



Advocates for Animals • A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

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March 3, 2025

State of Rhode Island House Judiciary Committee

RE: IN SUPPORT OF HB5668 (prohibiting the declawing of cats)

Dear Chair Craven, Vice Chairs Hagan and Knight, and Committee members:

Thank you for considering HB5668, an important animal protection bill, which will prohibit the inhumane and unnecessary practice of declawing in Rhode Island. The Paw Project is an international nonprofit, veterinarian-run organization, with members in Rhode Island, that has worked for over 25 years to end declawing. Declawing is a series of amputations of all or most of the last bone of each of an animal's toes and performed to prevent unwanted scratching. Declawing removes an integral part of an animal's anatomy and subjects animals to the risks of pain, infection, behavioral changes, and lifelong lameness. Safe and effective alternatives to declawing include simple training, nail caps, and other established deterrent methods. We urge you to vote YES on this bill.

Declawing has been common in the US, but it is illegal or considered unethical by veterinarians in most countries. The Paw Project drafted nation's first statewide declaw ban New York in July 2019. Maryland banned declawing in 2022, as did Massachusetts in 2024. There have been anti-declaw bills introduced in NJ, PA, IA, AZ, WA, and IL in 2024, so far. In recent years, public opinion regarding declawing has evolved due to educational campaigns and published evidence exposing the harmful effects of declawing. Eight cities in California, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Burbank, Santa Monica, Berkeley, Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, and Culver City, have prohibited declawing. Denver (CO), Austin (TX), Madison (WI), Allentown (PA), Pittsburgh (PA), Tacoma (WA), Evanston (IL) and St. Louis (MO) are some of the other US cities to have banned declawing. In the past few years, declawing has been prohibited in nine of ten Canadian provinces.

The Feline Veterinary Medical Association (FelineVMA) forbids its certified Cat Friendly practices from performing declaw surgery. FelineVMA states, "There is no current peer-reviewed data definitively proving that cats with destructive behavior are more likely to be euthanized, abandoned, or relinquished. The decision (by veterinarians) of whether or not to declaw should not be impacted by these considerations." VCA and Banfield Hospitals, which operate many veterinary clinics, will not perform "below standard of care" declaw procedures.

Much evidence exists that behavioral changes following declawing can result in the relinquishment of animals to shelters. The CDC and NIH advise pet owners to "not declaw" their animals since declawing is not an effective means of preventing opportunistic disease in immunocompromised individuals.

In 2018 and 2024, peer-reviewed scientific articles in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* reported the harmful effects of declawing, stating that "declawing increases the risk of long-term or persistent pain, manifesting as unwanted behaviors such as inappropriate elimination (soiling/urinating outside of the litter box) and aggression/biting. This is not only detrimental to the cat (pain is a major welfare issue and these behaviors are common reasons for relinquishment of cats to shelters), but also has health implications for their human companions, as cat bites can be serious."

We proudly support this bill, which will greatly protect animals and will end declawing in Rhode Island.

Sincerely yours,

Jennifer Conrad, DVM, Founder and Director, Paw Project