



March 4, 2025

The Honorable Rep. Robert Craven  
Chairman, House Committee on Judiciary  
State of Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**LETTER OF OPPOSITION TO H5668 – AN ACT RELATING TO ANIMALS AND  
ANIMAL HUSBANDRY -- CRUELTY TO ANIMALS -Declaw**

Dear Chairman Craven and members of the House Committee on the Judiciary:

The Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association opposes the proposed legislation. The Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association believes that declawing should only be performed by a qualified, licensed veterinarian as a final alternative to euthanasia after all medical and behavioral modification efforts have been exhausted and placement of the pet in a more suitable environment is not possible. Furthermore, the veterinarian has an obligation to educate clients on alternatives to the procedure as well as potential complications.

Behavior problems, such as destructive scratching, are the most common reason cats are surrendered to shelters. Cats can continue to exhibit destructive or even dangerous scratching behavior despite the best efforts of the owner and the veterinarian to control the behavior. Veterinarians, in consultation with the owner, are the most qualified individuals to decide if the declaw procedure is then warranted. Although any procedure can have complications, claims that declawing causes permanent intractable pain in cats are untrue. If it were true, veterinarians would *never* do them.

RIVMA concurs with the American Veterinary Medical Association on this issue. The AVMA statement is as follows: *The AVMA strongly encourages client education prior to consideration of onychectomy (declawing). It is the obligation of the veterinarian to provide cat owners with a complete education with regard to the normal scratching behavior of cats, the procedure itself, as well as potential risks to the patient. Onychectomy is an amputation and should be regarded as a major surgery. The decision to declaw a cat should be made by the owners in consultation with their veterinarian. Declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent the cat from using its claws destructively or when its clawing presents an above normal health risk for its owner(s).*

The Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association believes that this legislation is redundant to the State of Rhode Island's veterinary practice laws. The veterinary practice laws already stipulate that a veterinarian is the only professional who may conduct surgical procedures on animals. The veterinary practice laws already address the various components of this bill. They mandate that a

veterinarian only perform procedures that “Diagnoses, prognoses, treats, administers, prescribes, operates on, manipulates or applies any drug, biologic, or chemical or any apparatus or appliance for any disease, pain, deformity, defect, injury, wound, or physical condition of any animal for the prevention of or to test the presence of any disease.” Making a recognized surgical procedure subject to a criminal prosecution is unwarranted. Furthermore, fear of criminal prosecution could cause veterinarians to refrain from exercising any therapeutic exception even when needed. Delayed treatment and increased pain and suffering could result. The Board of Veterinary Medicine is the only body that can evaluate whether the procedure itself, or a therapeutic exception, is warranted.

The veterinary practice laws further provide for licensure of veterinarians and itemize those issues which would lead to license revocation. There is an established process by which complaints may be made regarding a veterinarian and an oversight body – the Board of Veterinary Medicine – to govern the conduct of licensed veterinarians. This law attempts to supersede the authority of the Board of Veterinary Medicine.

The Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association believes that this legislation establishes a precedent of creating regulations redundant to and outside of the parameters of the veterinary practice laws and requiring oversight of veterinarians by public officials other than the Board of Veterinary Medicine. Feel free to contact me with any questions: (401) 533-4872.

Warmest Regards,



Leonard Lopes