



February 14, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

The Honorable Troy Singleton
400 North Church St., Suite 260
Moorestown, New Jersey 08057

RE: OPPOSITION TO S-1803 - PROHIBITS SURGICAL DECLAWING OF CATS AND OTHER ANIMALS

Dear Senator Singleton:

I am writing you on behalf of the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA), a broad-based animal welfare organization founded in 1991 to provide balanced and fact-based answers to complex and controversial issues regarding animals. NAIA's membership is diverse and includes New Jersey pet owners, hobby dog breeders, rescuers, sportsmen, pet businesses, conservationists, farmers, scientists, and veterinarians.

I am writing to express our deep concern over S-1803, which would prohibit the surgical declawing of cats and other animals. Although the intentions behind this bill are well meaning and the purpose of the bill sounds wholesome, there are good reasons why expert organizations like veterinary associations and leading cat organizations oppose it: Passing it will lead to unintended consequences and outcomes that diminish the quality of life for some New Jersey citizens.

We often see proponents of declawing prohibitions suggest that the main reason people choose to declaw their cats is because they are shallow, self-absorbed individuals who care more about their furniture than the well-being of their cat. Although such people probably exist, it is individuals with compromised immune systems, including senior citizens who are vulnerable to serious infections from cat scratches who need to have their cats declawed in order to keep them. As currently written, this proposal omits these cat lovers from consideration altogether. For these individuals who've enjoyed the companionship of cats throughout their lives, not being able to have their cat declawed means not being able to have a cat in their lives at all. This is a sad and unnecessary outcome for people and pets alike.

Other proponents of this legislation suggest that behavior problems will result from the procedure. They also emphasize the pain associated with declawing surgeries. The reality is a little more nuanced. Although there are studies that report behavior problems, after a thorough review of the scientific literature, the AVMA concludes that “there is no scientific evidence that declawing leads to behavioral abnormalities when the behavior of declawed cats is compared to that of cats in control groups.” Surgery of any kind has risks and when done improperly can be painful. But when properly performed under the care of a veterinarian with the appropriate anesthetics and post-operative care, this surgery can be safe and humane.

Furthermore, the decision over whether to pursue any elective procedure is one that must be made between an animal owner and his or her veterinarian. Legislation to limit the professional judgment of veterinarians is inappropriate. Lawmakers should not attempt to substitute their views on husbandry issues and veterinary medicine in general, for those of a licensed, professionally trained veterinarian.

Finally, there are many cats in shelters and roaming New Jersey neighborhoods that need homes. Seniors and immune-compromised individuals are among those who routinely adopt them now. If these adopters can no longer safely bring these cats into their homes, the likelihood of a good outcome for these cats declines.

In a perfect world where cats weren't dying in the streets and in shelters for lack of a home and where loneliness didn't afflict the elderly and sick, this bill would make more sense. But in the world we live, it will do more harm than good. Few situations in life are black or white. Accordingly, the best and most effective solutions recognize the gray areas. The best solutions are seldom binary.

While this proposal properly recognizes that declawing should not be undertaken lightly, it doesn't recognize the important role that cats play in the lives of a diverse community of pet owners, which includes people who are immune compromised. It is one thing to discourage a procedure that can be overused, but we believe it is harmful to codify a declawing ban in light of the demonstrated needs of constituents and animal welfare. Respectfully, I ask that you reconsider this legislation and rely on the expertise, competence, and compassion of trained veterinary professionals to determine the best outcomes for their patients.

Please contact me if I can offer any additional information or be of help on this or future animal-related legislation.

Sincerely,



Patti Strand, President,
National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA)