



Support Bill S.3376 (Griffo)/A.595(Rosenthal)

Declawing Myth vs. Fact

Myth #1: *“The New York State Veterinary Medical Society (NYSVMS) is the acknowledged and respected voice for the veterinary medicine profession.”*

Fact: The NYSVMS, which opposes S.3376/A.595, does not speak for all veterinarians and represents fewer than half (40%-50%) of the veterinarians in New York State. Additionally, NYSVMS members are not routinely polled for their opinions on legislation; rather, the legislative priorities are determined by a small executive group within the organization. There are over 130 practicing New York State veterinarians actively championing S.3376/A.595, including members of the NYSVMS.

Myth #2: *“Implementation of this legislation would take away a veterinarian’s ability to counsel a client on the onychectomy (declawing) procedure and provide it as a treatment option where he or she deems it to be the suitable medical decision.”*

Fact: The language of S.3376/A.595 makes a clear exemption for cases of therapeutic onychectomy, where the surgery is needed for the physical benefit of the animal – such as nail bed tumors or bone infection. Declawing in other instances is not a “medical decision.” In other instances, it is either a convenience procedure and/or an action taken despite current animal welfare or public health recommendations that advise against its use.

Myth #3: *“They [veterinarians] maintain an obligation to provide pet owners a complete education with regard to normal scratching behavior of cats and all available alternatives before performing the procedure.”*
“The declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent a cat from using its claws destructively....”

Fact: This alleged commitment to provide education and all alternatives to owners before declawing their cats refers to a suggestion/guideline only. It is not an enforced policy within the veterinary profession nor a demonstrably accepted norm. There is no mechanism by any regulatory entity to ensure any veterinarians are accurately and responsibly conveying facts to their clients about this frequently misrepresented and high-risk series of amputations. Declawing being used “only as a last resort” is in fact, unsupported by statistics: as published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, veterinarians have declawed approximately 25% of cats in U.S. homes (at least 20 million cats nationwide).

Myth #4: *“Clawing and scratching can be highly dangerous and detrimental to families with immunocompromised members or family members with other health issues.”*

Fact: The National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States Public Health Service and the Infectious Diseases Society of America have published a joint statement that clearly states “declawing is not advised” to prevent disease spread to healthy or immune-compromised individuals, including those with HIV.

Veterinary journal articles indicate that declawed cats are more likely to bite. The CDC and NIH recommend washing cat scratches with soap and water. Cat bites, on the contrary, pose dramatically greater infection and bleeding risk to both healthy and health-compromised individuals. According to The Mayo Clinic, one out of three cat bites result in hospitalization, and over 65% of those hospitalized require hand surgery.

Myth #5: *“Declawing should remain a viable alternative to shelter surrender and euthanasia if all other options have failed.”*

Fact: Reports in peer-reviewed veterinary research journals indicate that declawing is associated with increased litter box avoidance and increased force and/or frequency of biting. These, not furniture scratching, are the top two behavioral reasons why cats are surrendered to U.S. shelters. The majority of cats surrendered to shelters are euthanized.

Declawing prohibition legislation has already been enacted in eight U.S. cities. Every one of these city shelters had a documented reduction in cat intakes to their shelter systems after enacting the legislation. These reductions have remained consistently lower to the present. The Los Angeles shelter system reports a 43% reduction in the number of owner-surrendered cats after the declaw ban was enacted. This amounts to tens of thousands of cats saved.

Over 50 NY shelters and rescues have endorsed S.3376/A.595. Many shelters and rescues across the state have contractual policies whereby potential adopters must agree not to declaw the adopted cat.

Myth #6: *“The surgical performance of an onychectomy by a licensed, trained veterinarian is done with proper anesthesia and multimodal pain control, making it indistinguishable from other surgical procedures performed on cats and other animals. In addition, when done properly, it should never damage the sensitive foot pads of a cat or result in nerve damage or intense and chronic pain.”*

Fact: Unlike surgeries performed for therapeutic reasons, declawing subjects cats to serious risks while providing no medical benefit whatsoever to the cat. Declawing has an extremely high post-surgical complication rate of 50%. In addition, 20% of declawed cats show long-term adverse effects; these high complication rates are not typical among common therapeutic veterinary surgeries. Declawing involves at least ten separate amputations of toe bones. The long-term complications of declawing, including arthritis, lameness, infection, and behavioral changes can and do occur regardless of the surgical technique employed for declawing and regardless of the anesthesia and pain control used.