

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1904

As Reported by House Committee On:
Health Care & Wellness

Title: An act relating to prohibiting the act of declawing cats.

Brief Description: Prohibiting the act of declawing cats.

Sponsors: Representatives Peterson, Leavitt, Parshley, Fosse and Macri.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care & Wellness: 1/14/26, 1/23/26 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Prohibits the performance of a declawing procedure on a cat, except for therapeutic purposes.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Bronoske, Chair; Lekanoff, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice Chair; Marshall, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Davis, Macri, Manjarrez, Obras, Parshley, Shavers, Stonier, Stuebe and Thai.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Valdez, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Engell.

Staff: Chris Blake (786-7392).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Practice of Veterinary Medicine.

Any person practicing veterinary medicine in the state must be licensed by the Department of Health. The practice of veterinary medicine, surgery, and dentistry is, among other things, the diagnosis, prognosis, or treatment of diseases, defects, conditions, or injuries of animals, for hire, fee, or compensation. This may include administering drugs, performing operations, performing any manual procedure for the diagnosis of pregnancy, sterility, or infertility of livestock, or implanting any electronic device for the purpose of establishing or maintaining positive identification of animals.

Veterinarians must keep daily written records of the animals they treat, including separate records for each companion animal. The records must be readily retrievable and kept for three years from the last treatment or examination. The records must include identifying information related to the owner and the animal as well as sufficient information to justify the tentative diagnosis and to warrant the treatment, such as the animal's medical history, physical examination, treatment administered, medication information, and progress of the case. Veterinary medical records and images are the property of the veterinarian that orders them. Copies of the records must be made available to the owner within 10 days of a request by the owner.

Declawing.

Feline onychectomy or "declawing" is a surgery that removes the first digital bone of a cat by laser, scalpel, or nail trimmer.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

It is unlawful for a veterinarian to perform a declawing procedure on a cat unless it is necessary for therapeutic purposes. The term "declawing procedure" includes several types of procedures that: (1) remove a portion of the paw or digit of a cat in order to remove a claw; (2) cut or modify the tendon of the limb, paw, or digit of a cat in order to prohibit the normal movement of a claw; or (3) prevent the normal functioning of one or more claws of a cat. The term does not include nail filing, nail trimming, or the placement of temporary nail caps on a cat. The term "therapeutic purpose" includes actions that are matters of medical necessity related to a condition in the claw, nail bed, or toe bone that jeopardizes the animal's health. The term does not include procedures performed for cosmetic purposes or convenience in the keeping or handling of an animal.

Local government ordinances regulating the performance of a declawing procedure on a cat are preempted.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill removes the veterinarian recordkeeping and reporting requirements related to declawing procedures, as well as the fines for performing a declawing procedure

and a reference to disciplinary action.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is another opportunity to look at animal cruelty laws and make sure we are doing the right thing to protect our little fuzzy friends. Declawing is not a benign procedure. It involves the amputation of a cat's toes and can result in lifelong pain, behavioral issues, and physical impairment. Declawed cats are subject to shelter surrender due to behavior challenges the owner can no longer manage, and they are very hard to rehome and, when they are adopted, they are often quickly returned. This bill takes a balanced and humane approach by preserving medically necessary care while protecting cats from unnecessary suffering.

Declawing bans help the community, because taxpayers do not have to pay to house, and ultimately kill, these cats because they have behavior problems and they help veterinarians because they will not be pressured by clients into doing something they know that is morally and ethically wrong.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The bill should be amended to remove sections dealing with unnecessary recordkeeping, reporting to the state, and increased burden on small veterinary businesses.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Strom Peterson, prime sponsor; Dr. Jennifer Conrad, Paw Project; Tracey Frankcom; Leah Houser; Craig Tebeau, DVM, The Cat Doctor Veterinary Center; John Hines, Council Member, City of Tacoma; Stephanie Hillman, Humane World for Animals; Leslie Dalzell, THE HUMANE SOCIETY FOR TACOMA and PIERCE COUNTY; Leslie Dalzell, THE HUMANE SOCIETY FOR TACOMA and PIERCE COUNTY; and Leslie Dalzell, THE HUMANE SOCIETY FOR TACOMA and PIERCE COUNTY.

(Other) Greg Hanon, Washington State Veterinary Medical Assoc.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.