
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 867
Author: Lee (D), et al.
Amended: 9/3/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE BUS., PROF. & ECON. DEV. COMMITTEE: 10-0, 6/23/25
AYES: Ashby, Choi, Archuleta, Arreguín, Grayson, Menjivar, Niello,
Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg
NO VOTE RECORDED: Weber Pierson

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 72-0, 4/28/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Veterinary medicine: cat declawing

SOURCE: Animal Legal Defense Fund
Humane World for Animals
The Paw Project

DIGEST: This bill prohibits a veterinarian from performing a declaw procedure, as defined, on any feline unless the declaw procedure is for a therapeutic purpose as specified.

Senate Floor Amendments of 9/3/25 clarify that this bill does not prohibit a veterinarian from trimming a feline's nail or applying nonsurgical scratching mitigation solutions and add language to resolve a chaptering conflict.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Veterinary Medical Board (VMB) under the Department of Consumer Affairs, to license and regulate veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians (RVT), issue premises permits for veterinary hospitals

and Veterinary Assistant Controlled Substances Permits (VACSP). (Business and Professions Code (Business and Professions Code (BPC) § 4800 *et seq.*)

- 2) Authorizes the VMB, at any time, to inspect the premises in which veterinary medicine, veterinary dentistry, or veterinary surgery is practiced, and specifies that the VMB's inspection authority does not extend to premises that are not registered with the VMB. (BPC § 4809.5)
- 3) States that a person practices veterinary medicine whenever they perform a surgical or dental operation upon an animal, as specified. (BPC § 4826)
- 4) Provides specific exemptions from licensure requirements, as specified. (BPC § 4827(a))
- 5) Prohibits a local government from prohibiting a licensed healing arts professional from engaging in any act or performing any procedure that falls within the professionally recognized scope of practice of that licensee. (BPC § 460)
- 6) Prohibits an individual from performing, or arranging for the performance of, surgical claw removal, declawing, onychectomy, or tendonectomy on any cat that is a member of an exotic or native wild cat species, with the exception of procedures performed solely for a therapeutic purpose. (Penal Code § 597.6)

This bill:

- 1) Clarifies that performing a tendonectomy, onychectomy, or any type of claw removal (declaw procedure) on a feline is the practice of veterinary medicine.
- 2) Requires an onychectomy, tendonectomy, surgical claw removal, or declaw on any feline or any procedure to otherwise alter a feline's toes, claws, or paws to prevent or impair the normal function of the feline's toes, claws, or paws to be performed solely for a therapeutic purpose.
- 3) Defines a "therapeutic purpose" for purposes of this bill to mean a, "medically necessary procedure to address an existing or recurring infection, disease, injury, or abnormal condition in the claws, nail bed, or toe bone, which jeopardizes the feline's health. "Therapeutic purpose" does not include a procedure performed for cosmetic or aesthetic purposes or to make the feline more convenient to keep or handle.

- 4) Excludes performing a declaw procedure from the ownership exemption, as specified.
- 5) States that the provisions of this bill do not prohibit a veterinarian from nail trimming or applying nonsurgical scratching mitigation solutions, such as the application of a device to the tip of a claw.
- 6) Subjects a licensee or registrant of the VMB to discipline for performing a declaw procedure without a therapeutic purpose, as specified.
- 7) Adds language to resolve a chaptering conflict with AB 1502 (Berman).

Background

Declawing. According to information from the American Veterinary Medical Association, “cat declawing is the surgical amputation of all or part of a cat’s third phalanges (toe bones) and the attached claws. Most often, the procedure involves the front paws only, but sometimes the claws are removed from all four paws.” Ethical concerns have been raised about elective cat declawing, which may be completed for non-medical reasons, as being rather cruel to the animal, painful, with little benefit to the overall health of the animal. The benefit seems to exist for the animal owner with respect to furniture saved from scratches. There are reported instances when declawing a cat is medically necessary including for the removal of cancerous nail beds, among others. This bill would prohibit a veterinarian from performing a declaw procedure on a feline, unless it is performed for a medically necessary purpose of the feline.

In 2004, AB 1857 (Koretz, Chapter 876, Statutes of 2004) prohibited declawing “exotic” or “big” cats. That bill established misdemeanor penalties for a violation, which is punishable by imprisonment in a county jail for up to one year, a fine of \$10,000, or by both, unless the procedure was the result of a medical necessity. AB 1857 was applicable only to “exotic or native wild cat species” which may include lions, tigers, cougars, leopards, lynxes, bobcats, caracals, ocelots, margays, servals, cheetahs, snow leopards, clouded leopards, jungle cats, leopard cats and jaguars, or any hybrid thereof AB 1857, did not apply to domestic house cats.

There are a number of jurisdictions in California that had passed local ordinances restricting cat-declaw procedures (without a medical purpose) prior to that time and remain today. This bill clarifies that existing ordinances adopted before

January 1, 2026, which prohibit cat declaws (many with exemptions designated for a therapeutic purpose) are not preempted by the provisions of this bill.

Veterinary Medical Board. In order to practice veterinary medicine in California, an individual must have a license issued by the VMB. The VMB protects the public from unprofessional and unlicensed practice of veterinary medicine. The VMB requires adherence to strict licensure or registration requirements for veterinarians, RVTs, and VACSP holders and ensures that each licensee or registrant has met the necessary level of competence required to perform animal health care services. The VMB investigates complaints – and if violations are confirmed, may take disciplinary actions against its licensees or those individuals that may be providing unlicensed practice. In order to obtain a license to practice veterinary medicine an individual must meet specified education requirements and pass an examination.

According to information on the American Veterinary Medical Association’s (AVMA) website, “The AVMA discourages the declawing of cats as an elective procedure and supports non-surgical alternatives to the procedure. The AVMA respects the veterinarian’s right to use professional judgement when deciding how best to protect their individual patients’ health and welfare.”

This bill maintains a veterinarian’s discretion to perform a declaw procedure if it is determined to be medically necessary. This bill makes it clear that a declaw procedure may not be performed to make the feline “more convenient” to be kept as a pet, such as to protect furniture or to address a human health condition. Should a veterinarian perform the procedure for a non-therapeutic purpose as defined in this bill, the veterinarian may be subject to discipline by the VMB. This bill exempts a declaw procedure from the ownership exemption to the practice of veterinary medicine. This bill further clarifies that a declaw procedure is considered the practice of veterinary medicine, and therefore anyone who performs such a procedure who is not a veterinarian will be subject to enforcement for unlicensed veterinary practice. Recent amendments clarify that nail filing or other nonsurgical scratching mitigation solutions are not prohibited.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

SUPPORT: (Verified 9/3/25)

Animal Legal Defense Fund (co-source)

Humane World for Animals (co-source)

The Paw Project (co-source)

Alley Cat Allies
 Animal Advocates Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
 Cat Town
 City of West Hollywood
 Democrats for the Protection of Animals
 Filoli Gardens
 Humane Veterinary Medical Alliance
 Kitten Rescue
 Laguna Woods Cat Club
 Michelson Center for Public Policy
 Patricia H. Ladew Foundation, INC.
 San Diego Humane Society
 Strategic Action for Animals
 West Radiologic Services

OPPOSITION: (Verified 9/3/25)

California Veterinary Medical Association

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: Supporters note generally that declawing cats for non-medical reasons to protect human health is not necessary as other alternative methods exist, and there are numerous jurisdictions with prohibitions currently in place.

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: The California Veterinary Medical Association writes in opposition and notes, "...the CVMA is deeply concerned that the veterinary profession is being singled out among our fellow healing arts professionals with legislation proposing to ban specific medical and surgical procedures in statute, which is a dangerous precedent."

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 72-0, 4/28/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Hadwick, Krell, Macedo,
Sanchez

Prepared by: Elissa Silva / B., P. & E.D. /
9/6/25 10:30:13

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