

## CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 867 (Lee)

As Amended September 3, 2025

Majority vote

**SUMMARY**

Prohibits a person from performing a declawing or similar procedures on any cat unless the person is licensed as a veterinarian in California and the veterinarian is performing the declawing for a therapeutic purpose, as defined.

**Senate Amendments**

- 1) Includes performing a "tendonectomy, onychectomy, or any type of claw removal on a feline" as an action that constitutes the practice of veterinary medicine.
- 2) Mandates that a tendonectomy, onychectomy, or any type of claw removal on a feline, or "otherwise alter a feline's toes, claws, or paws to prevent or impair the normal function" shall be performed solely for a therapeutic purpose.
- 3) Defines "therapeutic purpose" as 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.
- 4) Clarifies that "therapeutic purpose" does not include a procedure performed for a cosmetic or aesthetic purpose or to make the feline more convenient to keep or handle.
- 5) Clarifies that veterinarians are not prohibited from nail trimming or applying nonsurgical scratching mitigation solutions, such as the application of a device to the tip of a claw.
- 6) Makes "performing a surgical claw removal, declawing, onychectomy, or a tendonectomy on any feline or otherwise altering a feline's toes, claws, or paws" an action that constitutes denial, revocation, or suspension of a veterinarian license.

**COMMENTS**

*Cat Declawing.* Speaking generally, "declawing" refers to any procedure intended to prevent an animal from using its claws, through removal of either the claws or the animal's ability to use them. Onychectomy involves removing an animal's claws through a surgery that may include the amputation of bone through nail trimmers, scalpels, or lasers. Tendonectomy is a procedure performed for a similar purpose in which a cat's tendons are severed to prevent a cat from extending its claws.

According to recent data, an estimated 20-24% of cats in the United States have been declawed. Declawing is performed on domesticated cats to prevent the animal from scratching humans or other animals, as well as furniture and other possessions within a home. Studies indicate that many individuals who declaw their cats would likely give up their pets if the scratching were allowed to continue, and surveys have demonstrated that pet owners believe their relationships with their cats improve following declawing. However, the author of a prior related bill previously provided data suggesting the relinquishing of cats has decreased in cities that banned declawing.

Notwithstanding the asserted benefits of declawing domesticated cats, there have long been criticisms that declawing is inherently inhumane toward cats when done purely for the convenience of an owner. There is an assumption that declawing is a painful or uncomfortable procedure for cats, though the extent to which this is true remains to be a matter of medical consensus. Complications can also arise as a result of the procedure, as with any other invasive surgery performed on an animal.

In January of 2020, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) revised its formal policy regarding the declawing of domestic cats. Previously, the AVMA focused on encouraging client education prior to consideration of declawing procedures, citing scientific data indicating that cats that have destructive scratching behavior are more likely to be euthanatized or abandoned. The new policy continues to defer to a veterinarian's professional judgment, while more strongly discouraging elective declawing. The full text of the statement is as follow:

The AVMA discourages the declawing (onychectomy) of cats as an elective procedure and supports non-surgical alternatives to the procedure. The AVMA respects the veterinarian's right to use professional judgment when deciding how to best protect their individual patients' health and welfare. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the veterinarian to counsel the owner about the natural scratching behavior of cats, the alternatives to surgery, as well as the details of the procedure itself and subsequent potential complications. Onychectomy is a surgical amputation and if performed, multi-modal perioperative pain management must be utilized.

Historically, the overall lack of scientific consensus as to what constitutes an appropriate clinical context for claw removal, as well as a lack of moral consensus about whether the procedure should be generally prohibited on a humanitarian basis, has led to active debates in various local jurisdictions, as well as within foreign governments. Australia, Austria, Brazil, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom have all banned declawing in some way. Meanwhile, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Berkeley, Burbank, Culver City, West Hollywood, Santa Monica, and Beverly Hills have all banned declawing.

However, in 2008, legislation was introduced in California in response to concerns about local governments enacting their own local ordinances to carve away portions of licensed veterinary scope of practice authorized at the state level. Following litigation by the California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) against the City of West Hollywood over its local ban on declawing, the CVMA sponsored AB 2427 (Eng) of 2008 to expressly state that it is unlawful for a locality to prevent a healing arts licensee from engaging within the licensed scope of their practice. Supported by a broad range of healing arts professional associations beyond veterinary medicine, this bill effectively stopped the trend of local governments banning declawing within their jurisdictions.

Existing law within the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act already prohibits any non-veterinarian from performing surgical procedures, including declaw procedures. The measure before this committee would prohibit any person, regardless of whether they are a licensed veterinarian, from performing an onychectomy, tendonectomy, or similarly disruptive procedures on a cat. Violations would be subject to specified civil penalties. Only a "therapeutic purpose," as defined, would allow a licensed veterinarian to perform the procedures, and only a cat's physical medical condition would provide that justification. The veterinarian would not be allowed to

perform a procedure for a cosmetic or aesthetic purpose or to make the cat convenient to keep or handle.

### **According to the Author**

"Cat declawing, the amputation of the first knuckle of each cat's toes, is an outdated, cruel, and unethical surgical procedure that results in lifelong disfigurement and pain. Many countries have already outlawed this inhumane practice. AB 867 shows the nation and world that California does not endorse surgical mutilation performed electively on healthy cats for human convenience. This bill safeguards the welfare of cats by protecting them from the harmful and barbaric surgical procedure of declawing."

### **Arguments in Support**

The *Paw Project* is sponsoring this bill, writing: "Declawing is a series of amputations of all or most of the last bone of each of an animal's toes and performed to prevent unwanted scratching. Declawing removes an integral part of an animal's anatomy and subjects animals to the risks of pain, infection, behavioral changes, and lifelong lameness. Safe and effective alternatives to declawing include simple training, nail caps, and other established deterrent methods."

### **Arguments in Opposition**

The *California Veterinary Medical Association* (CVMA) opposes this bill, writing: "While this bill is aimed at prohibiting veterinarians from performing a surgical declawing procedure on cats under certain circumstances, it would—if passed—have a far-reaching and precedential impact on a veterinarian's ability to practice veterinary medicine." CVMA states that it 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."

## **FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill has "Minor and absorbable costs to the Board, as it anticipates a minor increase in complaints and already has an established investigation process for the types of complaints that might arise as a result of this bill."

## **VOTES:**

### **ASM BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS: 13-0-5**

**YES:** Berman, Ahrens, Bains, Caloza, Chen, Elhawary, Haney, Irwin, Jackson, Krell, Lowenthal, Nguyen, Pellerin

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Flora, Alanis, Bauer-Kahan, Hadwick, Macedo

### **ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4**

**YES:** Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Sanchez, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 72-0-7**

**YES:** 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

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Hadwick, Krell, Macedo, Sanchez

**UPDATED**

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