

REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

DATE: April 9, 2019

TO: Honorable Members of the Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee

FROM: Sharon M. Tso  Chief Legislative Analyst Council File No: 19-0002-S51
Assignment No: 19-04-0317

SUBJECT: Declawing reduction

CLA RECOMMENDATION: Adopt Resolution (Koretz – O’Farrell) to include in the City’s 2019-2020 State Legislative Program SUPPORT for AB 1230 (Quirk), which would require a licensed veterinarian to provide written justification in an animal’s medical record for each declawing procedure that explains the therapeutic necessity of the procedure for the animal.

SUMMARY

Declawing is a surgical procedure, also known as onychectomy, in which a cat’s toes are amputated at the last joint. The Resolution states that declawing is often mistakenly conceived of as a simple cosmetic procedure, similar to fingernail trimming, with the purpose of stopping unwanted scratching. Declawing can lead to physiological problems, such as excruciating pain, damage to the radial nerve, hemorrhage, bone chips that prevent healing, painful re-growth of deformed claw inside of the paw, necrosis, arthritis, and muscle atrophy.

The Resolution recommends City support for AB 1230, which would lead to a reduction in declawing procedures.

BACKGROUND

Existing state law makes it a misdemeanor for a person to perform, or otherwise procure or arrange 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. AB 1230 would prohibit a person from performing a declawing on a cat or other animal unless the person is licensed as a veterinarian and the veterinarian records the therapeutic purpose for the procedure in the animal’s medical record. AB 1230 would allow the Veterinary Medical Board to revoke the license of a veterinarian if they determine that the veterinarian has not provided adequate therapeutic justification for the procedure. Additionally, AB 1230 would make it a crime for a person who is not a licensed veterinarian to perform a declawing procedure on an animal.

Declawing has been banned in the City of Los Angeles since 2009. It is also banned in West Hollywood, San Francisco, Berkeley, Santa Monica, Burbank, Beverly Hills, and Culver City, and many other cities and countries worldwide. The veterinary associations in several Canadian provinces, including British Columbia and Nova Scotia, prohibit veterinarians practicing in those provinces from performing declawing or tendonectomy procedures. The Resolution notes that many harmless solutions for unwanted scratching exist, including trimming a cat’s claws with nail

clippers, training a cat to use a scratching post, deterrent pheromone sprays, replaceable claw covers, and furniture tape.

Declawed cats often develop behavioral problems, particularly biting and litter box avoidance, which make them much less desirable as pets or cripple them for life. The Los Angeles Department of Animal Services (DAS) notes that five years after the City's declawing ban, the amount of cats relinquished to shelters was reduced by 43.3%.

DEPARTMENTS NOTIFIED

Department of Animal Services

BILL STATUS

02/21/19	Introduced.
03/11/19	Referred to Committee on Business and Professions.
04/01/19	From committee chair, with author's amendments: Amend, and re-refer to Committee on Business and Professions. Read second time and amended.
04/02/19	Re-referred to Committee on Business and Professions



Tristan Noack
Analyst

SMT:tcjn

Attachment: Resolution

RESOLUTION

RULES, ELECTIONS & INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

WHEREAS, any official position of the City of Los Angeles, with respect to legislation, rules, regulations or policies proposed to or pending before a local, state, or federal governmental body or agency must have first been adopted in the form of a Resolution by the City Council with the concurrence of the Mayor; and

WHEREAS, AB 1230 (Quirk) introduced on February 21, 2019, would prohibit a person from performing a declawing on a cat or other animal unless the person is licensed as a veterinarian and the veterinarian files a written statement to the Veterinary Medical Board in the Department of Consumer Affairs explaining why the declawing is being performed for a therapeutic purpose; and

WHEREAS, AB 1230 would allow the Veterinary Medical Board in the Department of Consumer Affairs to revoke the licenses of veterinarians who do not provide written justification explaining why each declawing procedure is therapeutically necessary for the animal; and

WHEREAS, declawing is often mistakenly conceived of as a simple cosmetic procedure similar to fingernail trimming, with the purpose of stopping unwanted scratching; and

WHEREAS, declawing is actually a cruel and inhumane surgical procedure commonly performed on cats that involves amputating the last bone of each of a cat's toes, with a scalpel, guillotine clipper, or laser; and

WHEREAS, declawing presents numerous health risks to a cat, and has been banned in the City of Los Angeles since 2009, as has West Hollywood, San Francisco, Berkeley, Santa Monica, Burbank, Beverly Hills, and Culver City, and many other cities and countries worldwide; and

WHEREAS, declawing creates physiological problems, such as excruciating pain, damage to the radial nerve, hemorrhage, bone chips that prevent healing, painful re-growth of deformed claw inside of the paw, necrosis, arthritis, and muscle atrophy; and

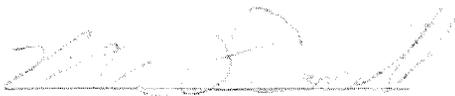
WHEREAS, declawing a cat robs it of one of its primary defense mechanisms and produces psychological problems, which are more difficult to address than unwanted scratching, including difficulty using a litter box, increased aggressiveness, and excessive biting; and

WHEREAS, there are no justifiable reasons to declaw animals for the intended purpose of protecting humans from unwanted scratching; including people with compromised immune systems, bleeding disorders, and other medical conditions; since effective and humane alternatives to declawing exist; and

WHEREAS, many harmless solutions for unwanted scratching exist, including trimming a cat's claws with nail clippers, training a cat to use a scratching post, deterrent pheromone sprays, replaceable claw covers, and furniture tape;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, with the concurrence of the Mayor, that by the adoption of this Resolution, the City of Los Angeles hereby includes into its 2019-2020 State Legislative Program SUPPORT for AB 1230 (Quirk), which would require a licensed veterinarian to provide written justification for each declawing procedure that explains the therapeutic necessity of the procedure for the animal.

PRESENTED BY: 
PAUL KORETZ
Councilmember, 5th District

SECONDED BY: 

ORIGINAL

tcjn  4/12/19