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Op Ed - Time's Up on Inhumane Declawing

from Massachusetts Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

ARTICLE | **OP ED** | JULY 25, 2019 05:15 AM | BY **CAPECODTODAY STAFF**



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Cats make wonderful pets. Because cats can be less demanding than their canine counterparts, they usually adjust easily to various lifestyles and living spaces. They value their independence, but also can give incredible amounts of love.

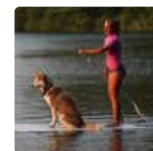
However, with that companionship comes every part of your feline friend, including claws. We sometimes hear, "My cat is ruining my furniture!" or "I'm afraid the cat will scratch the baby!" In seeking to address these concerns, pet owners may ask about removing their cat's claws. Maybe they have always had declawed cats, or they aren't aware of the serious risks associated with the procedure. Whatever the reason, declawing is not the answer—and there exist many alternatives to address scratching concerns.

The MSPCA-Angell has not performed a non-medical declawing in almost 35 years. Though declawing sounds like a procedure that simply removes the cat's claws, akin to trimming a person's nails, this is far from accurate. Declawing in fact usually involves multiple, partial amputations that can be incredibly painful and can lead to chronic complications. The standard declawing procedure calls for the removal of both the claws and the first bone of the toes, or a tendonectomy, a procedure in which a cat's tendons are cut so that the claws cannot be extended. The operation is usually performed on the front feet, an amputation comparable to the removal of all of a person's fingertips at the first knuckle.

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Claws are integral to a cat's physical and emotional well-being in a number of ways. Claws, for example, play a critical role in a cat's ability to move about their environment safely, contributing to their agility, balance, and the capacity to establish solid footing for walking, running, springing, climbing, and stretching. A cat's claws are also its best defense mechanism.

Scratching is also central to a cat's well-being. The outer part of cat claws regularly becomes frayed, requiring maintenance. When cats scratch, they pull off this outer part and expose sharp, smooth claws. Scratching is also a way of fulfilling a cat's strong instinctive need to mark his or her territory. Not only do cats mark objects by visibly scratching them, but scratching also deposits secretions from glands in the feet that can be smelled by other cats. Scratching also provides valuable stretching and foot-muscle exercise.

There are several risks associated with declawing. The cat will inevitably experience pain in the recovery and healing process, but he or she may also experience infection or tissue necrosis, regrowth of misshapen claws, nerve or paw pad damage, and bone spurs. Also, if during the recovery process a cat finds it painful to walk on litter, they could develop a life-long aversion to using the litter box, which could in turn lead to owner surrender. Additionally, declawed cats are put at a safety risk, with their ability to defend themselves or escape from danger seriously impaired.

Declawing is especially unacceptable considering the numerous alternatives available to resolve unwanted scratching behaviors. For example, pet owners can buy scratching posts, keep their cat's nails trimmed, choose tightly woven rather than loose furniture fabric, apply double sided sticky tape to furniture, and use citrus or pheromone spray. The MSPCA-Angell has extensive information and detailed suggestions about these alternatives on its website:

https://www.mspca.org/pet_resources/declawing/.

Yesterday, New York became the first state in the nation to ban declawing, joining most of Europe, several Canadian provinces, and a host of American cities and towns in outlawing the procedure.

A Massachusetts bill sponsored by Senator Mark Montigny prohibits inhumane feline declawing and tendonectomies, and also makes important exemptions to allow these procedures when there is a therapeutic need, such as removing a cancerous tumor from the nail bed. This bill, S. 169, An Act prohibiting inhumane feline declawing, was heard on July 23 before the state legislature's Joint Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee, which will make an initial decision about whether the bill moves forward through the legislature. If you think this bill should pass, contact your legislators (find out who they are at wheredoivotema.com) and let them know.

Declawing is a painful procedure that can have serious consequences for your pet. If you have questions about declawing—or about your cat's behavior—don't hesitate to call us. We'll do our best to help you establish and maintain a happy relationship with your feline friend, while keeping both your furnishings and your pet intact.

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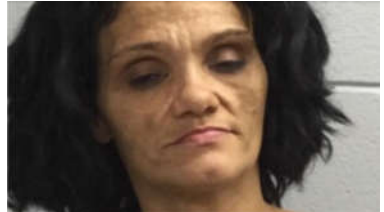
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