

From: [Diane Matt](#)
To: [dence - City Council](#)
Cc: [Bartleson, Debra K. - CC City Council Central Office](#)
Subject: Materials for Distribution to Council for November 6, 2017 Meeting Regarding 17-0709
Date: Monday, November 06, 2017 11:22:06 AM
Attachments: [CVMA Letter to Council 17-0709.doc](#)
[French Testimony City Council 17-0709 .doc](#)
[Fuhrman Testimony to Safe House 17-0709.doc](#)
[French Testimony to Safe House 17-0709.doc](#)

Good Morning,

Please see the four attached documents from the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association to the City Council. We request that they be forwarded to all Council members in preparation for tonight's meeting.

Many thanks, and please feel free to contact me at 303-503-7540 if there are any questions or problems.

Diane Matt

CEO-Designate

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November 6, 2017

The Honorable Albus Brooks, President
Denver City Council
City and County Building
1437 Bannock St., Rm. 451
Denver, CO 80202

Re: 17-0709—Ordinance adding section 8 – 141 to Chapter 8, Article VII of the Denver Revised Municipal Code to prohibit surgical claw removal, declawing, onychectomy, or tendonectomy on cats.

Dear President Brooks and Council Members:

The Colorado Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on ordinance 17-0709 under consideration by the City Council that would make declawing of domestic cats unlawful and assign criminal penalties for performing the procedure. The Colorado Veterinary Medical Association does not support onychectomy (declawing) being performed routinely, we also have grave concerns about legislative and regulatory actions that remove the professional judgment of veterinarians in determining when to perform specific veterinary procedures.

Good animal health and welfare is supported by the veterinarian's ability to apply professional judgment within the context of the veterinary-client-patient relationship

Best health and welfare outcomes for veterinary patients, clients, and the public require that decisions involving the diagnosis and treatment of veterinary patients—including the performance of surgical procedures such as declawing—be made by the animal's veterinarian in consultation with the animal's owner. This ensures that each animal receives the best possible care that is uniquely tailored to its needs. Veterinarians must retain authority to exercise professional judgment in making clinical decisions that are in the best interest of their patients. The adoption of 17-0709 would circumvent the professional judgment of Denver veterinarians and disrupt the veterinarian-client-patient relationship, which has long been the foundation of veterinary medical practice.

Viable alternatives to legislative and regulatory action

With respect to onychectomy, and as an alternative to legislative and/or regulatory action, the CVMA strongly recommends that veterinarians thoroughly educate cat owners about the normal scratching behaviors of cats and that they support their clients in exploring and implementing alternatives to declawing. The CVMA assists veterinarians in their efforts by providing online information and educational resources that can help them communicate effectively with their clients (see <http://colovma.org/cat-declawing/>). If such alternatives fail, with a potential consequence being the relinquishment and/or euthanasia of the cat, then onychectomy becomes the option of last resort. These statements are supported by a recent survey of veterinary practices which revealed that most veterinarians recommend nonsurgical alternatives to onychectomy and the veterinarians who perform the surgery do so infrequently, at a rate of one procedure or fewer performed per month.¹

Declawing is not a preferred choice, but may be necessary to avoid relinquishment and/or euthanasia, and allow a cat to remain in an otherwise excellent home

While declawing is not typically a medically necessary procedure, the veterinarian's ability to perform it can literally be a matter of life or death for some cats. Cats expressing destructive scratching behavior are vulnerable to being relinquished, released or abandoned, or euthanized. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, nationwide an estimated 70% of cats relinquished to shelters are euthanized, and therefore it is in the interest of most cats to remain in their homes. Consequently, when other approaches to resolving destructive behavior fail and the alternative is relinquishment of the cat, veterinarians need the option of onychectomy. While not a first choice, if properly performed, declawing may allow a pet cat to remain in an otherwise excellent home. While most cat owners will never need to consider declawing, others are dealing with difficulties such as stringent tenancy requirements and potential eviction or human health conditions where medical advice is to eliminate any risk of a scratch injury. In the face of these unique challenges, owners may find that declawing becomes a "less bad" outcome compared with surrendering their pet.

Pain management and patient outcomes

Veterinarians recognize that onychectomy is a major surgery. Appropriate use of safe and effective anesthetics and perioperative analgesics for an appropriate length of time is imperative. Pain management is necessary (not elective) and required for this procedure. Multimodal pain management is recommended, and there should be a written aftercare plan. Just as for other surgical procedures, advancements in knowledge and technology mean that onychectomy procedures have evolved. Contemporary approaches to onychectomy have resulted in reduced surgical complications and better patient outcomes. Current scientific data do not support assertions that declawing, when performed properly, leads to long-term pain, behavioral abnormalities, or impairment of normal behavior when declawed cats are compared with cats in control groups.

We recognize that declawing is a controversial procedure; however, we speak for the profession in asking you to reconsider the appropriateness of 17-0709 and ensure that veterinarians retain their ability to apply their professional judgment when it comes to medical and surgical decisions that impact the health and welfare of their patients. Veterinarians have an obligation to consider the unique needs of the patient that is in front of them and a duty to inform their clients of a given procedure's risks, benefits, and alternatives. Declawing is neither unique nor singular in that regard. We thank you for supporting our patients, their owners, and our profession by protecting the ability of veterinarians to act in their patients' best interests.

The CVMA was founded in 1888 and has over 2,390 members in Colorado, including 116 veterinarians who practice in Denver. CVMA is the voice of the veterinary profession in Colorado; its members are engaged in a wide variety of professional activities and are dedicated to the art and science of veterinary medicine. For questions regarding this letter, please contact Diane Matt, CEO-designate at dianematt@colovma.org.

William French, DVM
President

C. Diane Matt, CAE
Chief Executive Officer-designate

¹Ruch-Gallie R, Hellyer PW, Schoenfeld-Tacher R, et al. Survey of practices and perceptions regarding feline onychectomy among private practitioners. J Am Vet Med Assoc 2016;249(3):291-298.



Testimony on 17-0709 Bill to Amend Chapter 8 Cat Declawing
City and County of Denver Safety, Housing, Education & Homelessness Committee
November 6, 2017

My name is Dr. Will French. I am a veterinarian and president of the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association.

CVMA opposes the declawing of cats, AND we oppose the proposed ordinance.

Some of the unsubstantiated statements presented by Dr. Lavizzo, while they make a dramatic point, are simply inaccurate. One of the studies that he references points out that the majority of veterinarians do not perform declaws via the guillotine method, but in fact use a scalpel blade which has much more satisfactory outcomes than those illustrated in Dr. Lavizzo's presentation. Additionally, when asked about complication rates, specifically long term chronic lameness, veterinarians reported that fewer than 1% of declaws have those complications.

I appreciate the councilmember's comments at the Safe House Committee meeting regarding a fundamental function of government as being the regulation of professions that can't regulate themselves.

In response to that statement, it is important to be aware that the veterinary profession is regulated by Colorado's State Board of Veterinary Medicine, under the Department of Regulatory Affairs. The State Board of Veterinary Medicine is a 7-member board of veterinarians and public members that licenses veterinarians, investigates complaints about the practice of veterinary medicine, disciplines violators of the law and/or Board's Rules, and makes rules and regulations that govern the conduct of veterinarians.

It is also important to know that the veterinary profession is already effectively shifting practice by educating its constituents about declawing cats – the number of declaws and doctors performing declaws is dramatically declining.

Another fundamental purpose of government is to protect and preserve individual rights. And the right of an individual to make a medical decision, no matter how ethically difficult, within the confines of a relationship between a doctor and their patient is one of crucial import.

If Dr. Lavizzo would like to identify and present to the state board cases declaws that were performed without adequate pain control or surgical technique, I would gladly stand with him in front of that group to testify as to the pain and suffering placed on those animals. If the PAW project would like to collaborate on an educational campaign for landlords about the problematic nature of requiring residents to have declawed their cats, the CVMA would gladly engage in such efforts.

Declawing is an extremely complex issue, and a blanket ban is simply bad policy that will fail to bring about desired change. Changing hearts and minds about this issue is admittedly harder work, but is sounder policy, and a path that we are committed to, not simply banning it in Denver alone, which may have unforeseen consequences contrary to the welfare of cats.



Testimony on 17-0709 Draft Bill to Amend Chapter 8 Cat Declawing 10-25-17
City and County of Denver Safety, Housing, Education & Homelessness Committee
October 25, 2017

Good morning. My name is Dr. Will French. I am a veterinarian and president of the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association which counts 119 veterinarians practicing in Denver among its 2,392 Colorado members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning.

CVMA opposes the declawing of cats, AND we oppose the proposed ordinance. Here's why:

- We support the principle that complex veterinary decisions rightfully belong in the domain of the owner and the veterinarian.
- We support owners and veterinarians having well-informed discussions and making thoughtful, appropriate decisions about declawing
- We support vigorous education of cat owners and landlords about non-surgical ways to manage scratching
- We support the continuing, dramatic decline in declawing – which nowadays is rarely offered in a "spay/neuter package"
- We support the use of modern surgical methods, advanced equipment, and effective pain management in all veterinary procedures
- We support the use of data and research for thoughtful, effective animal welfare policy-making
- And finally, we support the human-animal bond, through which people and animals experience the unique joys and benefits of these special relationships

The proposed ordinance oversimplifies complex decision making, restricts veterinarians from their duty and opportunity to educate, and takes the human out of the human-animal bond. Therefore, we are opposed. We would welcome the opportunity to be included in the dialogue and deliberation about animal policy and urge you to consider the perspectives of the veterinary profession on this emotional and multi-faceted question. For all these reasons, we respectfully ask that this measure not be passed out of committee.



Testimony on 17-0709 Draft Bill to Amend Chapter 8 Cat Declawing 10-25-17
City and County of Denver Safety, Housing, Education & Homelessness Committee
October 25, 2017

Good morning committee members. My name is Dr. Joy Fuhrman. I am a veterinarian and I serve as president-elect of the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association.

I have known Dr. Lavizzo for several years and I have served alongside him on the Board of the Fort Collins Cat Rescue and Spay Neuter Clinic.

I *do not* support declawing cats. However, this issue is about so much more than cats and their toes. There are significantly larger issues at play. This is actually about protecting medical decisions without government interference. Choices and decisions made between myself and a human medical professional either about my own care or about that of my child are private and protected, whether outsiders agree or disagree with the decisions made. The highest court in our land has upheld this right.

CVMA believes the government must protect the right of owners and veterinarians to make private medical decisions. If the Denver City Council does not protect this right, then what is the next right that will be taken away from citizens of this city, state or nation?

For this reason, we respectfully ask that this measure not be passed out of committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.