

## 86-O-24

**AN ORDINANCE**

Amending Title 9, Chapter 4 of the City Code to Prohibit Declawing of Cats

**WHEREAS**, declawing, also known as onychectomy, is a surgical procedure that involves the amputation of the last bone of each toe of a cat and removal of nerves, joint capsules, collateral ligaments, and extensor and flexor tendons up to the joint, akin to amputation of a human finger at the last knuckle; and

**WHEREAS**, declawing is not merely a cosmetic procedure akin to trimming nails but a severe surgery that can lead to significant physical and behavioral issues in cats; and

**WHEREAS**, declawing robs cats of integral means of movement and defense, normal posture, normal use of toes in walking and running, and their ability to satisfy instinctive impulses to climb, exercise, and stretch; and

**WHEREAS**, numerous studies and veterinary organizations, including the American Association of Feline Practitioners, have highlighted the detrimental effects of declawing, including chronic pain, lameness, behavioral changes such as increased aggression or anxiety, and other long-term health problems; and

**WHEREAS**, the Humane Society of the United States, the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Alliance, the Animal Legal Defense Fund, and the Paw Project support legislation to prohibit the declawing of cats unless the medical procedure is medically necessary for therapeutic purposes and performed by a licensed veterinarian; and

**WHEREAS**, more than twenty cities and three states across the United States, as well as many countries around the world, have already recognized the cruel and unnecessary nature of this procedure and have banned it or have taken steps to ban it; and

**WHEREAS**, prohibiting the declawing of cats more accurately and thoroughly protects the safety of the residents of Evanston than declawing, as declawed cats are 4.5 times more prone to defending themselves by biting than those with claws, according to a 2017 study published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, and cat bites are associated with higher rates of infection than scratches, such that the Centers for Disease Control does not recommend declawing as a way to protect human health, even for the immunocompromised; and

**WHEREAS**, multiple studies and statistics from multiple jurisdictions where declawing has been banned indicate that the prohibition of declawing procedures does not lead to an increase in the number of cats relinquished to shelters; and

**WHEREAS**, the Evanston City Council finds that it is in the best interest of the City of Evanston residents to amend the City Code to prohibit the declawing of cats.

**BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF EVANSTON, COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS:**

**SECTION 1:** Title 9, Chapter 4 of the Evanston City Code of 2012, as amended, is hereby further amended by adding the following section:

**9-4-22. - DECLAWING PROHIBITED**

(A) *Definitions:* As used in this Section, the following words, terms, and phrases have the following meanings:

<i>CAT:</i>	An animal of the taxonomic family felidae.
<i>DECLAWING PROCEDURE:</i>	An onychectomy, partial or complete phalangectomy, partial digital amputation, tendonectomy, or other procedure to alter a cat's toes, claws, or paws to prevent the normal functioning of the cat's toes, claws, or paws. "Declawing procedure" does not include the trimming of nonviable claw husk or placing nonpermanent nail caps.
<i>ONYCHECTOMY:</i>	A procedure in which a portion of the paw of a cat is amputated to remove or disable a claw, including, without limitation, procedures commonly referred to as declawing.
<i>PARTIAL DIGITAL AMPUTATION:</i>	A procedure for the excision of some or all of one or more of the phalanges of the paw of a cat.
<i>PHALANGECTOMY:</i>	A procedure for the excision of one or more of the phalanges of the paw of a cat.
<i>TENDONECTOMY:</i>	A procedure in which the tendons to the limbs, paws, or toes of a cat are cut or modified so that the cat's claws cannot function normally.
<i>THERAPEUTIC PURPOSE:</i>	A medical necessity, as determined by a licensed veterinarian, to address an existing or recurring infection, disease, injury, or abnormal condition in the claws, nail bed, or toe bone that jeopardizes the cat's physical health. "Therapeutic purpose" does not include cosmetic or aesthetic reasons for the purpose of making a cat more convenient to keep or handle.

(B) Prohibition: A person may not perform a declawing by any means on a cat within the City of Evanston unless the procedure is necessary for a therapeutic purpose. Any declawing procedure performed in compliance with this Section 9-4-22(B) shall be performed by a licensed veterinarian.

(C) Violation: Any person who violates Section 9-4-22(B) shall be

fined \$2,000. Each declawing procedure shall constitute a separate and distinct offense to which a separate fine shall apply.

**SECTION 3:** All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict herewith are hereby repealed.

**SECTION 4:** If any provision of this Ordinance or application thereof to any person or circumstance is held unconstitutional or otherwise invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of this Ordinance that can be given effect without the invalid application or provision, and each invalid application of this Ordinance is severable.

**SECTION 5:** This Ordinance shall be in full force and effect after its passage and approval.

**SECTION 5:** The findings and recitals contained herein are declared to be prima facie evidence of the law of the City and shall be received in evidence as provided by the Illinois Compiled Statutes and the courts of the State of Illinois.

Introduced: December 09, 2024

Approved:

Adopted: December 09, 2024

December 09, 2024

*Daniel Biss*

Daniel Biss, Mayor

Attest:

Approved as to form:

*Stephanie Mendoza*

*Alexandra B. Ruggie*

Stephanie Mendoza, City Clerk

Alexandra B. Ruggie, Corporation Counsel



**Testimony in Support of Ordinance 86-0-24  
Prohibiting the declawing of cats**

**City Council  
City of Evanston  
November 25, 2024**

The Humane Society of the United States, the nation's largest animal protection organization, supports passage of Ordinance 86-0-24, which would end the practice of nontherapeutic declawing of cats in the state. Declawing has serious implications for feline welfare and the bond between people and their cats. If passed, Evanston would join a rapidly growing number of communities taking a stand against this inhumane practice.

Convenience declawing of cats is already illegal in New York State, Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. It is banned in eight California cities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, the city and county of Denver, Colorado and the city and county of St. Louis, Missouri, in Austin, Texas, Pittsburgh and Allentown, Pennsylvania, Madison, Wisconsin and Volusia County, Florida, among others. Nine out of ten Canadian provinces prohibit non-therapeutic declawing.

Nontherapeutic declawing is banned or considered an unethical veterinary practice in a vast number of countries, from New Zealand to Brazil to the United Kingdom. The European Convention on the Protection of Pet Animals prohibits the procedure throughout the European Union.

The veterinary community is increasingly opposed to declawing. The Feline Veterinary Medical Association, the American Animal Hospital Association, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Alliance are opposed. The major veterinary hospital chains, VCA, Banfield, and Blue Pearl, do not offer elective declaw procedures on cats. Many U.S. veterinary schools no longer routinely teach declaw procedures.

However, we can't continue to wait for the veterinary profession to end declawing on its own. These amputations are still too commonly practiced, and cat owners are often not made aware of the high risk of permanent adverse effects on cats or of the procedures' controversies - that many veterinarians won't amputate a cat's toes unless there is a valid medical need.

**There are no valid reasons to declaw a cat.**

Arguments in favor of declawing often center around the desire to prevent unwanted scratching of either furniture or people. Amputation is an extreme response to what can be addressed with regular nail trimming, a variety of scratching posts and a better understanding of feline behavior. Moreover, declawed cats are at a greater risk of developing more serious adverse behaviors after amputation, such as litter box aversion or an increase in biting and aggression, than the ones the amputations were meant to prevent.

In pain, and no longer able to defend themselves with their claws, cats may resort to biting. The documented increased biting behavior of declawed cats can lead to more severe disease in people than cat scratches. Cat bites carry a dangerously high infection risk to healthy and immunocompromised people alike. Infectious disease specialists do not recommend declawing. The



National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Infectious Diseases Society of America jointly stated that declawing is “not advised” to protect the health of even severely immune-compromised patients.

**Scratching is a natural behavior for cats.**

Declawing is not done for the benefit of the cat as it prevents the cat from performing natural behaviors. The act of scratching removes the dead husks from their claws, marks territory, both visually and with scent glands in their paws, and stretches their muscles. Scratching is important for a cat’s physical and mental wellbeing. In appropriate scratching can be managed with training and a better understanding of cat behavior. What is natural behavior for a cat often is considered misbehavior by humans, especially when furniture or other household objects are damaged in the process. While veterinarians can counsel their clients, veterinary behaviorists and certified cat behavior consultants can be employed for more difficult cases, as declawing should never be considered a “last resort.”

**Declaw bans do not lead to more cats being surrendered to animal shelters—in fact, they may help keep cats in their homes.**

There is a false narrative that a cat owner unable to get their cat declawed is likely to relinquish that cat to an animal shelter or abandon that cat outdoors. The risk of a cat ending up homeless or worse, euthanized, due to a declaw prohibition is grossly overestimated. A recent study of data from British Columbia shelters covering the three years prior to and three years after a province-wide declaw ban went into effect showed that there was no increase in cats being relinquished or euthanized. The number of owner-surrender cats actually decreased after the ban. Publicly available data from Los Angeles and other California cities at the forefront of enacting declaw bans also show no increase in cat intake at shelters citywide once declawing was prohibited.

The reality is that due to the higher prevalence of long-term adverse impacts of multiple amputations, declawing puts cats at a greater risk of eviction from their homes and relinquishment to shelters and rescue organizations. According to a study published in the Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association, among relinquished cats, 52.4% of declawed cats were reported to exhibit litter box avoidance, compared to 29.1% of non-declawed cats.

**Declawing is no good for cats or people. It’s time to end the practice.**

Given the facts laid out above, the HSUS asks for your favorable vote on Ordinance 86-0-24, a humane bill which will protect the health and well-being of family pets.

Danielle Bays  
Senior Analyst, Cat Protection and Policy  
The Humane Society of the United States  
[dbays@humanesociety.org](mailto:dbays@humanesociety.org)