

San Francisco Recommends Ban on Feline Declawing

The city would adopt the language of an anti-declaw ordinance that passed in West Hollywood in 2003.

Posted: July 22, 2009, 3 a.m. EDT

The San Francisco ordinance would make declawing illegal except for therapeutic purposes such as removal of infected or injured tissue. The San Francisco Commission of Animal Control and Welfare, the animal welfare advisory board to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, voted 5-1 earlier this month in favor of a city ban on feline declawing for nontherapeutic reasons.

Commissioner Philip Gerrie recommended that San Francisco adopt the language of an anti-declaw ordinance passed in West Hollywood in 2003. The West Hollywood measure, the first of its kind in the United States, makes it illegal to perform declawing within city limits, except for therapeutic purposes such as removal of infected or injured tissue.

Declawing, which involves amputating all or part of the last bone and connecting tendons and ligaments on a feline's paw, can result in lameness and other physical problems, said Jennifer Conrad, DVM, director of The Paw Project, which sponsored the West Hollywood ordinance.

The California Veterinary Medical Association is opposed to such bans, arguing that the practice of veterinary medicine should be left to veterinarians.

The association filed suit against West Hollywood to overturn the law in 2005, stating that the city's ordinance was unlawful, invalid and unenforceable because it conflicted with state law. However, in a 2-1 ruling in June 2007, the Court of Appeal upheld the anti-declaw ordinance. The San Francisco City Attorney's office filed legal arguments in support of West Hollywood.

The CVMA continued by sponsoring SB 762, legislation to ensure statewide uniformity of standards for medical professionals. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the bill on July 2, which prevents local jurisdictions from passing bans on medical procedures, such as declawing cats. The law takes effect on Jan. 1, 2010. Any bans passed before that time would stand, including the San Francisco measure.