

**MEMORANDUM IN OPPOSITION**

**October 7, 2016**

**S.5084 – Griffo (In Senate Agriculture Committee)  
A.1297 – Rosenthal (In Assembly Agriculture Committee)**

***AN ACT to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to the declawing of cats or other animals***

This memo in *opposition* is written on behalf of our client, the New York State Veterinary Medical Society. The New York State Veterinary Medical Society (NYSVMS) is the acknowledged and respected voice for the veterinary medicine profession. The Society's mission is to protect, promote, and advance the science and profession of veterinary medicine in New York State. The NYSVMS works to ensure that New Yorkers have access to the highest caliber veterinary care available in the most cost effective way.

This legislation would prohibit the performance of onychectomies ("declawing") on cats or other animals except where necessary for a therapeutic purpose; therapeutic purpose is defined as the necessity to address the medical condition of the animal such as an existing or recurring illness, infection, disease, injury, or abnormal condition in the claw that compromises the health of the animal (and not cosmetic or aesthetic reasons, nor reasons of convenience). The bill would also impose a violation punishable by law on each of the individuals involved in a declawing, including those performing the procedure, assisting with the procedure, and all individuals or entities involved in procuring, ordering, or paying for the procedure.

Veterinarians take the issue of onychectomy, a surgical procedure, very seriously. They maintain an obligation to provide pet owners a complete education with regard to normal scratching behavior of cats, the procedure itself, potential risks to the patient, and all available alternatives before performing the procedure. NYSVMS feels that declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent a cat from using its claws destructively or when its clawing presents an above-normal health risk to its owner or owners. Clawing and scratching can be highly dangerous and detrimental to families with immunocompromised members or family members with other health issues; as such, declawing is one method to allow a beloved feline companion to continue to live in a household rather than relinquishing the family pet to a shelter. Declawing should remain a viable alternative to euthanasia if all other options have failed.

Implementation of this legislation would take away a veterinarian's ability to counsel a client on the onychectomy procedure and provide it as a treatment option where he or she deems it to be the suitable medical decision. Medical decisions should be left to the sound discretion of fully trained, licensed, and state supervised professionals operating within appropriate standards of practice. The surgical performance of an onychectomy by a licensed, trained veterinarian is done with proper anesthesia and multimodal pain control, making it indistinguishable from other surgical procedures performed on cats and other animals. In addition, when done properly, it should never damage the sensitive foot pads of a cat or result in nerve damage or intense and chronic pain.

For the reasons stated above, we **strongly oppose** this legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

**JACKSON LEWIS P.C.**