

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY - 2026 SESSION

CHAPTER 829

An Act to amend and reenact § 54.1-3814 of the Code of Virginia, relating to devocalization of dogs prohibited.

[S 707]

Approved April 13, 2026

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 54.1-3814 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 54.1-3814. Declawing cats; devocalization of dogs; prohibition.

A. As used in this section:

"Cat" means any domesticated species of the family Felidae and does not include any wild or nonnative species of the family Felidae.

"Declawing procedure" means (i) an onychectomy, a dactylectomy, a phalangectomy, or any other procedure that removes a portion of the paw or digit of a cat in order to remove a claw; (ii) a tendonectomy or any other procedure that cuts or modifies the tendon of the limb, paw, or digit of a cat in order to prohibit the normal movement of a claw; or (iii) any procedure that prevents the normal functioning of one or more claws of a cat. "Declawing procedure" does not include nail filing, nail trimming, or the placement of temporary nail caps on one or more claws of a cat.

"Therapeutic purpose" means any action intended (i) to address an existing or recurring infection, disease, injury, or abnormal condition in an animal's claw, nail bed, or toe bone that jeopardizes the animal's health, and for which addressing the infection, disease, injury, or abnormal condition is a medical necessity, as documented by a licensed veterinarian, or (ii) to protect the owner's life or health, as documented by a licensed physician, when such owner has been diagnosed with an infection, disease, disorder, or similar condition that could reasonably be expected to worsen if such owner were to be scratched by a cat. For purposes of this definition, "owner" includes members of the owner's household. "Therapeutic purpose" does not include any action performed for cosmetic or aesthetic reasons or reasons of convenience in the keeping or handling of a cat.

B. It is unlawful for any person engaged in the practice of veterinary medicine to perform a declawing procedure on a cat, except such person may perform such a procedure if it is necessary for a therapeutic purpose.

C. It is unlawful for any person engaged in the practice of veterinary medicine to perform a surgical devocalization procedure on a dog, except when such procedure is necessary to treat or relieve any injury, disease, or congenital defect that is causing or may cause the dog physical pain or harm.