

# Animal Law Coalition

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On behalf of Animal Law Coalition's New York members, we endorse and urge your support of the A.B. 3431-A /S.B. 6167. The proposed humane legislation would make it illegal to devocalize a dog or cat. Devocalization is an act of animal cruelty that no one should be allowed to perform or cause to be performed.

It is nothing less than the cutting of an animal's vocal cords to cause the reduction or elimination of vocal sounds produced by that animal and includes procedures commonly referred to as "debarking", "silencing" or "bark softening".

The proposed law humanely allows vocal cord surgery for the rare instances in which it is necessary to treat or relieve a **physical** illness, disease or injury or congenital abnormality that is causing or which may reasonably cause physical pain or harm. It prohibits the more common, inhumane and cruel act of devocalization, vocal cord surgery performed specifically to alter or remove the voice.

There is increasing recognition of the cruelty of cutting a dog or cat's vocal cords regardless of whether done by a veterinarian or otherwise. Devocalization is outlawed in the United Kingdom and most European countries. In 2010 Massachusetts passed the first enforceable U.S. prohibition of devocalization on dogs and cats, an amendment to its animal cruelty statute.

Also, dogs and cats that cannot vocalize their intentions, moods or needs present a risk to the public and increased liability to owners. People may not realize a dog is about to bite or attack, for example, because a dog who has been devocalized can only make a wheezy, rasping sound that most people will not be able to interpret. A dog that cannot bark audibly and unambiguously also cannot signal danger to family members, for example, from an intruder or a fire.

Devocalization does not mean the dog or cat will be saved from euthanasia or relinquishment to a shelter. Animal shelters and rescue organizations in Massachusetts and New York have reported receiving devocalized animals.

Devocalization does not address the reasons a dog may be barking or a cat crying. Because the animal's distress, anxiety, illness, poor training, or whatever is causing the barking or crying, has not been addressed, it is likely to manifest in worse behaviors, like biting or soiling in the house, *increasing* the likelihood the animal is given to a shelter.

Also, there are risks with devocalization, especially buildup of scar tissue that may require a far more costly reparative procedure to be performed, often more than once. There can be side effects like airway obstruction, paralysis of the larynx, choking, gagging, coughing, etc. The

more vet bills to treat side effects or complications, the more likely the animal will end up in a shelter. After all, if an owner doesn't want to hear an animal, it's unlikely the owner will spend money to pay vets to treat complications from the procedure.

Devocalized animals are given up like any other, and actually barking is not typically a reason dogs are surrendered to shelters. There is **no** legitimate, ethical reason to surgically suppress an animal's voice for its own sake.

Please support this important humane legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

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**Animal Law Coalition** is a national organization committed to stopping animal cruelty and helping states and communities find humane solutions to safety, nuisance and other animal-related issues.