



Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association

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STATEMENT OF THE MASSACHUSETTS VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION ON DEVOCALIZATION OF HOUSEHOLD PETS, AND ON HOUSE NO. 344, “AN ACT PROHIBITING DEVOCALIZATION OF DOGS AND CATS”

The Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association, the statewide association of veterinarians, deplores devocalizing an animal to facilitate the animal's sale or for reasons of convenience.¹ MVMA encourages responsible pet ownership from the start, including selecting a breed and particular dog appropriate for the owner's living situation and foreseeable family circumstances; undertaking behavior training while a puppy; being consistent and reinforcing behavioral standards; seeking veterinarians' advice when problems arise; and consulting and working in earnest with veterinary behavior specialists, who can often help owners successfully address excessive vocalization problems. MVMA strongly urges pet owners to utilize behavioral interventions instead of devocalizing an animal.

In this imperfect world, however, we know that peoples' life situations can change. There may be circumstances when devocalization is necessary, particularly when the owner has already undertaken behavior modification techniques pursuant to a veterinarian's advice. When all acceptable avenues for correcting excessive barking have been exhausted, and the pet risks losing her or his life or home, we believe that surgical cordectomy needs to be available as a last resort. Ultimately, a decision to devocalize an animal should be made by the pet owner in consultation with a licensed veterinarian. Devocalization should be performed only in extreme circumstances – as a last resort before turning a pet over to an animal shelter or performing humane euthanasia – and should never be performed as a routine matter.

While the Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association strongly discourages canine and feline devocalization, the MVMA opposes House No. 344 for the following reasons:

- the bill requires that otherwise confidential information – such as the animal's identification and medical diagnosis, and identification and location of the animal's owner – be made public: we find no precedent for such public disclosure in medicine or veterinary medicine except when public health is at issue
- the bill provides too narrow an exception for performing devocalization, in that “medically necessary” is not the only legitimate reason for this procedure to be performed: surgical cordectomy may be necessary to save an animal's life when euthanasia is seen as the only viable alternative
- the bill infringes upon a veterinarian's exercise of her or his professional judgment, taking account of the particular condition and circumstances of the individual animal.

*Adopted by the MVMA Steering Committee,
June 17, 2009*

¹ This document addresses devocalization of dogs, as devocalization of cats is so uncommon it is essentially unheard of in the Commonwealth.