



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Mark Grisanti

## Senator Grisanti Proposes Bill to Prohibit Devocalization of Animals

MARK GRISANTI April 24, 2013

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*Senator Grisanti reveals part of his "four-legged legislative priorities" in honor of Prevention of Animal Cruelty Month*

**(BUFFALO, NEW YORK)** Senator Mark Grisanti (R,I-60) has introduced legislation to protect dogs and cats from what animal advocates worldwide deem animal abuse. NY Senate bill

S.2271 would prohibit devocalization, an elective procedure in which vocal cords are cut just to alter an animal's voice.

The companion bill, introduced by Assemblyman Ken Zebrowski, passed the NYS Assembly on March 4. Similar legislation was enacted in Massachusetts in 2010.

According to Sen. Grisanti, "Devocalization is brutal punishment for the 'crime' of communicating. It is patently cruel, and it should be illegal."

Veterinarians board-certified in surgery, anesthesiology and internal medicine say devocalization is always dangerous, potentially fatal, regardless of the vet's skill or the surgical route, through the animal's mouth or an incision in the neck.

Many devocalized dogs and cats cough and gag persistently, struggle to breathe and are at high risk for heatstroke. Some inhale food or vomit into their lungs. Scar tissue, a normal outcome of any surgery, can be deadly when it forms in the throat.

And according to shelter and rescue executives, these risks come without any benefit for animals, not even the claimed assurance of a home.

## **NO SAFE WAY TO DEVOCALIZE**

Three organizations are leading the grassroots campaign to support this legislation, joined by some 200 animal shelters, veterinarians and advocacy groups: **Animal Advocates of Western New York, Coalition to Protect and Rescue Pets**, and **New York State Humane Association (NYSHA)**.

**NYSHA Vice President Dr. Holly Cheever, DVM**, a veterinarian in Voorheesville, says "It is disingenuous to suggest the choice is 'devocalize or euthanize.' No one is forced to cut healthy vocal cord tissue **or** kill a healthy animal for barking or meowing."

Cheever, who chairs the **Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association's Leadership Council**, adds: "There are effective, humane solutions for those willing to pursue them, with rehoming a kinder 'final alternative' for those who won't. There is simply no safe or benign way to devocalize an animal."

Dr. Alex Klein, DVM, of Brooklyn, who treated a dog suffering complications of devocalization agrees, "Life after devocalization is miserable for animals." He says his patient suffered chronic throat inflammation that made it painful for him to bark, and infections due to devocalization.

### **AND NO BENEFIT FOR ANIMALS**

Proponents of devocalization claim altering an animal's voice is necessary to prevent surrender to a shelter. But shelter and rescue executives, like Joyce Garrity, Executive Director of Hyde Park's Dutchess County SPCA, disagree.

Garrity recalls the devocalized poodles relinquished to her shelter. "It was heartbreaking to hear the sound of their altered voices. All surgery has risks, but devocalization has no benefit for the animal. It is cruel."

Karen Mahmud of Long Island adopted a Chihuahua whose previous owner had her devocalized,

then didn't want her. "Lola coughs and gags a lot and has trouble swallowing thanks to devocalization. We have to water down her food and watch her when she eats to make sure she doesn't choke to death."

## A GROWING MOVEMENT

In 2010, Massachusetts enacted what currently is the only law in the US that prohibits devocalization of all dogs and cats statewide. But the movement to end devocalization is gaining momentum. More than 142,000 people have signed a petition calling on the American Veterinary Medical Association to stop justifying this behavior-masking surgery:

<http://change.org/stopdevocalizing>

According to **Leslie Burg, co-chair of Coalition to Protect and Rescue Pets**, which sponsored the Massachusetts law, “People who care about humane treatment of animals now look to the NYS Senate to take an ethical stand by passing S.2271 as it was introduced. Proposed [amendments](#) would sanction the cruelty this law is intended to prohibit.”

**Maureen Schiener, President of Animal Advocates of Western New York**, adds, “We’re grateful to Sen. Grisanti for introducing this humane legislation. Devocalization has been in the shadows for too long. Bringing it to the forefront is an important step toward ending this act of cruelty, selfishness and greed.”

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*Senator Grisanti is releasing his “four-legged legislative priorities” during the month of April in honor “Prevention of Animal Cruelty Month”. This is the first of four priorities in no specific order.*