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## Devocalization

### NYSVMS Position:

A number of proposals to ban the devocalization (bark softening) of dogs have been given consideration on the basis that such procedure is defacto cruel to the dog involved. Upon surveying its members, NYSVMS determined that devocalization appears to be a very infrequent procedure for which very few veterinarians have experience. At the same time, veterinarians in urban areas, particularly New York City, report it is often the final means of preventing the euthanization, or surrender, of a dog that has resisted behavioral modification.

The AVMA as the leader, has undertaken a review of the medical, social and humane aspects of this issue and modified its formal position. Both the AVMA and NYSVMS discourage the practice except when medically necessary and as a last resort for animals in cases where numerous prior attempts at socialization have failed, and the likely alternative is surrender of the animal, and likely euthanization in cases where an animal's owner literally must decide between a beloved animal and keeping an apartment or co-op. The NYSVMS also opposes regular kennel devocalizations as unnecessary.

NYSVMS urges the Legislature to work carefully to balance the interests of these animals with the urge to ban this procedure. Medical decisions should be left to the sound discretion of fully trained, licensed and state supervised professionals operating within appropriate standards of practice. NYSVMS believes this decision should be made on a case-by-case basis, and only in appropriate cases at the request of animal owners, following a full review of the animal's medical history.

### Facts:

- Canine devocalization does NOT involve cutting a major portion of a dog's throat; it is a simple procedure in which the doctor releases two rubber band-like structures with a little notch. Very little tissue is disrupted with a fast recovery time. Sutures and antibiotics are not necessary. Compared to a human tonsillectomy, canine devocalization is a very minor procedure. Human tonsillectomies are considerably more invasive.
- The devocalization surgery leaves the animal with a wheeze or squeak. The goal of this surgical procedure is simply to lower the volume of the dog's bark so that it doesn't carry over a long distance. Some refer to this as "softening the bark" of a dog.
- When surveyed, the majority of NYSVMS members support a devocalization law that allows veterinarians to perform the procedure as a last resort when behavioral modification is unsuccessful. A majority of respondents said they have never performed the procedure.
- There have been several documented cases where the owner was forced by their co-op board to have the devocalization procedure done or risk losing the dog. In one case, an owner in New York City actually committed suicide due in part to the stress of euthanizing his dog following pressure from his co-op board.
- Experienced veterinarians know the procedure is humane. Canine devocalization, or bark softening, may help preserve the important human/animal bond.
- This procedure has been performed for decades.