At this busy time of year, it remains important to keep up-to-date on state and local legislation.

In the last several years, the American Kennel Club (AKC) has monitored an increasing number of proposals at the state and local levels that seek to regulate groomers and grooming salons. Equally important are laws that may appear to affect only dog owners or breeders but could have a significant impact on you and other pet professionals.

Currently, a hot topic in canine legislation is tethering. State bills and local ordinances have been introduced all across the U.S. that seek to ban or limit tethering. Some of these laws are written so broadly that they would make it an animal cruelty offense to use a grooming noose.

Other legislation that can have harmful unintended consequences for professional groomers include arbitrary engineering requirements for pet enclosures, which may include minimum sizes that would outlaw the use of the crates and cages that are commonly and humanely used by groomers. Some proposed laws would require that every enclosure must provide more than one foot—or some other arbitrary measurement—of space above the head of the tallest dog. Numerous proposed laws seek to outlaw stacked enclosures or cage banks, including those with impermeable barriers between each level.

Titles or summaries of proposed or enacted law typically do not include this level of detail. Likewise, when the media picks up on a story, they may also pick and choose what aspects of a bill to report on. This is why it’s crucially important for groomers and pet professionals to follow legislation themselves, have someone they can rely on to review legislation and let them know if proposals are being made locally or in their state that may impact their businesses.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN PROBLEMATIC LAWS ARE INTRODUCED OR PASSED

The best way for your lawmakers to understand your business and how legislation affects you is to hear directly from you—their constituents.
Lawmakers often hear from lobbyists and activists who seek to advance a particular agenda. Unfortunately, they hear less from groomers and pet professionals who are experts on working with and caring for animals.

There is no more effective approach to impacting policy than the opportunity to meet and communicate personally and respectfully with policymakers before an issue arises. Few elected officials are grooming or animal experts. However, many will be called upon to make decisions regarding policies that directly affect grooming businesses and animals. Lawmakers want to hear from expert constituents who can help them make the right decisions for their community. Unless they hear from you, they may rely on inaccurate resources or information, and they’re unlikely to know how to assist you.

Animal rights activists may show photos of neglected animals trapped in tiny, dirty cages as “evidence” that small enclosures must be outlawed. As a counterpoint, you and other pet professionals must take time to explain your business practices and illustrate why you use crates, cages, properly calibrated dryers, grooming nooses, and other humane and accepted equipment to ensure the comfort and safety of animals in your care.

Get involved and demonstrate that you are reasonable, knowledgeable, and willing to assist. Volunteer to consult on the drafting of pet-related measures and to review drafts before they are finalized. The AKC Government Relations department is available to assist by providing analysis and commentary on proposed legislation impacting dogs.

But what if a bad law has already passed? Laws can be amended and laws can be repealed, especially when
Laws can be amended and laws can be repealed, especially when you communicate to your lawmakers how a bad law fails to protect animals, interferes with legal and accepted business practices, or reduces community resources.

SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

When legislation is discussed or introduced, learn about the background of the measure and who initiated it. Understand that if a law is proposed in response to a tragedy, such as “Bijou’s Law” that was discussed in last month’s issue, you may find that some may view your profession unfavorably. Continue to practice kindness and stick to fact-based information if dealing with emotion-driven issues. When you already have a trusted relationship with your local lawmakers, they will want your input, and expressing your concerns and offering appropriate solutions is a lot easier.

If you took a civics class in high school or college, you may be familiar with how state bills become law. Take time to also learn details of how laws are enacted in your state, county and city. A proposal must go through a series of steps: Each step represents an opportunity for you to get involved and to influence the content and outcome of a law. Contact your State representatives, or city or county clerk for information, to check the status of a proposed law, and to learn if and when a public hearing is scheduled.

Here are some additional steps you can take to be a successful advocate:

• Form strategic alliances with like-minded groups, such as other pet industry professionals, veterinarians, boarding kennel operators, pet breeders, sportsmen and agricultural organizations. Don’t forget your customers! Happy customers can be excellent allies. Share mutually relevant information with your allies and ask them for their support.

• Practice delivering concise and meaningful messages before you meet with legislators. If you sign up to speak at a community workshop or public hearing, you may only have 3 to 5 minutes to make your point. Use those minutes wisely.

• Seek a seat on animal advisory boards. These opportunities may exist at the state and local levels. Find out the criteria and ask your governmental officials to consider you for these roles. Along with your résumé, provide information on your experience in working with animals and how professional groomers are a valuable resource for pet owners in your community.

Get to know your lawmakers, learn the legislative process, work with allied groups and get prepared before problematic legislation arises. For resources and assistance, visit www.akcgr.org or contact the American Kennel Government Relations department at 919–816–3720 or doglaw@akc.org.