People value their pets. Understandably, when a pet is injured, well-meaning people want answers and they want assurances that it will never happen again. This can result in the introduction of proposed legislation that may appear to offer solutions, but that can actually result in unintended consequences that do not improve the wellbeing of animals.

HIGH-PROFILE INCIDENTS CAN PROMPT INTRODUCTION OF NEW LAWS

You may have heard of “Bijou’s Bill” in New Jersey. Bijou was a six-year-old Shih Tzu who died in the care of his groomer. His tragic story was repeated on social media, in the news, on “Good Morning America” and even on billboards. In response to Bijou’s story, legislation was introduced to ban use of grooming tools such as cage dryers, establish burdensome and arbitrary regulatory requirements, and other provisions. As originally introduced, the bill would have harmed responsible groomers and required the state to establish expensive licensing programs to enforce overly broad and burdensome regulations.

Groomers, pet industry professionals and the American Kennel Club offered alternate solutions, which included establishing a task force of grooming experts to develop reasonable licensing programs that emphasize health and safety. They further recommended establishing a public-private partnership utilizing AKC’s S.A.F.E. Certification Grooming Program or an equivalent professional program. By using existing resources, the state could more quickly launch an educational program at lower cost to both taxpayers and to professional groomers seeking continuing education opportunities.

Advocates and pet professionals helped influence the legislative process by being aware of the proposed law, working together and recommending better language. As a result, the revised House measure is more effective and less costly. A Senate version of the same is likely to be considered this year.

As part of their outreach and education efforts, advocates respectfully reminded lawmakers that there are already provisions in existing law to bring charges against a bad actor who commits an illegal act against an animal. In cases where a
In recent years, there have been multiple occasions when a person was arrested for dyeing a dog. In some jurisdictions, it is an animal cruelty offense to dye an animal because of laws that were enacted years ago in response to the irresponsible dyeing of Easter chicks and ducklings. For example, under South Carolina state law, it is “unlawful for any person to dye or color artificially any animal”. Groomers who use pet-safe dyes at the request of pet owners, who compete in creative grooming contests, or even just paint a pet’s toenails could find they are in violation of the law.

Are you familiar with your state and local laws? And more importantly, do you know how to approach your elected officials to request an amendment to an overly-broad law? At the request of constituents, some local prohibitions have been overturned so it’s no longer illegal in that town to safely dye a Poodle’s ears pink for breast cancer awareness—or just because it’s pretty.

AKC Government Relations provides online tools to help you be a better advocate for dogs and for your profession. Visit www.akc.org/gr and click on the “Legislative Toolbox” for a variety of downloadable materials that you can share with your fellow pet care professionals. Start with “Communicating Effectively with Your Legislators” and “Make Your Contact Count” for

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For elected officials to know what’s best for their community, they must hear from their constituents and from subject matter experts, such as professional groomers.

tips on how to get the conversation started with your lawmakers. You can also contact the AKC Government Relations department at doglaw@akc.org for information and talking points.

The policy-making process may seem intimidating, but ordinary citizens truly can impact it. For elected officials to know what’s best for their community, they must hear from their constituents and from subject matter experts, such as professional groomers. Put yourself in a lawmaker’s shoes. Few have any experience with dogs other than a family pet. If all that policymakers ever hear about is that isolated incident where, sadly, a dog was injured, then they are likely to base their decisions on that situation.

This is why it’s important to get to know your elected officials. Introduce yourself and tell them about your profession. Tell them about the great things you do to benefit pets and pet owners in your community. Establish yourself as a subject matter expert on pet grooming and the animal care you provide as a pet industry professional. Let them know that you are available to answer questions and provide honest, reliable information about your business. If you don’t get involved, your lawmakers may only hear one side of the story. By working together, we can promote good laws and more effectively amend or oppose problematic legislation. ➔

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