Customers may request creative services or ask that their dogs be groomed to resemble a particular “celebrity” dog. Expectations are high, and the pressure on groomers to deliver top results on wiggling, howling and sometimes uncooperative pets has never been greater.

In this age of instant communication, even the best-run grooming business can be negatively affected by a dissatisfied customer who posts a grievance on social media. The issue may be correctable, such as a groom job that didn’t exactly match the owner’s vision, but what about an accident that affects the safety or health of a pet? A distressed customer may contact the press, the story goes viral and a tragic incident that affected a single pet is perceived as a community-wide problem.

As discussed in a previous article, 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 legislation that seeks to regulate groomers.

Not only is expanded governmental oversight of groomers being discussed across the US, increased taxation of pet-related businesses may be considered as a revenue source. According to the American Pet Products Association, Americans are spending more on pets than ever before. In 2018, pet owners spent more than $72 billion on their pets, exceeding the previous year by more than $3 billion. More than $6 billion was spent on services such as boarding and grooming¹. These and other factors have brought pet care businesses under increasing governmental scrutiny.

In recent years, several states and municipalities have proposed pet groomer regulations. Some proposals sought to establish groomer certification requirements based on regulations for beauty salons and barbers. Such proposals do not consider the

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AKC Government Relations (AKC GR) and other animal advocacy groups worked to amend A3044, the NJ Assembly version of the bill, so that it is fair and benefits both groomers and pet owners.

**BRINGING BETTER SOLUTIONS TO THE TABLE**

"Bijou's Law" in New Jersey is among the highest-profile proposals that seek to regulate pet groomers. As first introduced, this legislation would have required the state to create a new groomer regulatory program from scratch, at significant cost and of undetermined efficiency.

AKC Government Relations (AKC GR) and other animal advocacy groups worked to amend A3044, the NJ Assembly version of the bill, so that it is fair and benefits both groomers and pet owners.

As amended, this bi-partisan bill creates a state board of grooming experts to set requirements for health and safety training, and promote continuing groomer education in conjunction with high quality training programs, including AKC’s S.A.F.E. Grooming Program.

As of press time, the companion bill (S2154) is awaiting a Senate committee hearing. AKC GR is working on amendments to the Senate version of the bill to make it identical to A0344. Please check for current information and updates on Bijou’s Law, NJ A3044/S2154, at www.akcgr.org.

The AKC S.A.F.E. Grooming Program was developed in consultation with experienced grooming professionals. This easily-accessible, comprehensive program provides an excellent resource to
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- on demand suction, hot water, and chemical
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groomers who wish to obtain certification from a recognized authority and for governmental agencies that seek to implement fair, science-based and cost-effective oversight of grooming businesses.

“The safety of our canine companions is a key concern for owners,” said Mark Dunn, Senior Vice President of Registration and Customer Development, American Kennel Club. “The course provides groomers with access to more information and safety procedures that go above and beyond the standard.”

GETTING IN FRONT OF THE ISSUES

Grooming professionals are urged to take action on issues that may affect their businesses. Get involved before laws and regulations are discussed or introduced in your state or community. Take the lead, offer solutions and establish yourself as a subject matter expert in your industry.

When advocating publicly, there is no substitute for practical knowledge. Get to know the issues thoroughly, focus on specific areas of concern and offer viable solutions that address those concerns. Expect questions from legislators or the public. Be prepared to answer those questions, provide data and share anecdotes to emphasize your point.

For example, if you decide to propose or advocate for groomer safety training, anticipate that lawmakers may want to know if the proposal addresses specific questions, including:

• Does a grooming practice have a disaster plan in place?
• Is every person in the shop trained on safe and proper handling?
• Do they maintain records of the pets they groom, including vaccination records and dates of expiration?
• How do they identify pets in
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each shop to ensure that each pet’s individual needs and/or health issues are addressed?
  • How does a grooming business ensure the safety of pets in the facility?
  • What training and experience have the groomers achieved?

You and your colleagues can influence the direction of legislation by approaching your lawmakers with resources and answers to their questions. Be proactive, well-informed and offer your knowledge and expertise as the best source of information about your profession.

The AKC Government Relations Department is pleased to partner with grooming professionals to assist you in preparing for legislative action; to provide legislators with fiscally sound, valid solutions; to ensure that legislation is fair and reasonable; and to promote measures that advance the safety of pets.

Contact AKC GR at doglaw@akc.org or 919–816–3720. For questions or additional information about the AKC S.A.F.E. Grooming Program, please contact groomer@akc.org.

REFERENCE