

Dog groomers snarl at proposed California legislation

By Ricardo Lopez, Los Angeles Times

California already licenses furniture upholsterers, private investigators and recreation guides.

Now it wants to regulate pet groomers.

In a state that leads the country in the number of professions requiring a license, a bill moving through the Legislature has struck a nerve among those who clip Fido and Fluffy.

Sen. Juan Vargas (D-San Diego), author of the proposed legislation, wants to provide pet owners "peace of mind" by creating a voluntary certification program. Groomers would have to complete about 900 hours of training and pay an as-yet unspecified fee to be certified by the state – a designation that amounts to a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.

Vargas says the measure, known as SB 969, is intended to protect pets from untrained groomers. He said he drafted the bill after learning about lacerations, broken bones – and in one case, death – that some animals suffered during trips to their barbers.

"The pets really are the silent victims," Vargas said. "They can't tell you what happens."

Vargas' initial aim was to force California's pet groomers to obtain a state license that would have required them to pass an exam and carry insurance. But that proposal lost much of its bite after facing opposition from small-business groups. A similar bill stalled in 2005.

But even the watered-down version has some groomers growling. They fear that voluntary certification is just a precursor to eventual licensing that would snag California's estimated 11,000 pet barbers in more red tape.

"I want the government out of my salon," said Johnny Ray, co-owner of the Dog House in North Hollywood. "It's just a money grab."

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