

N.J. could become 1st state to license all pet groomers on heels of NJ Advance Media investigation

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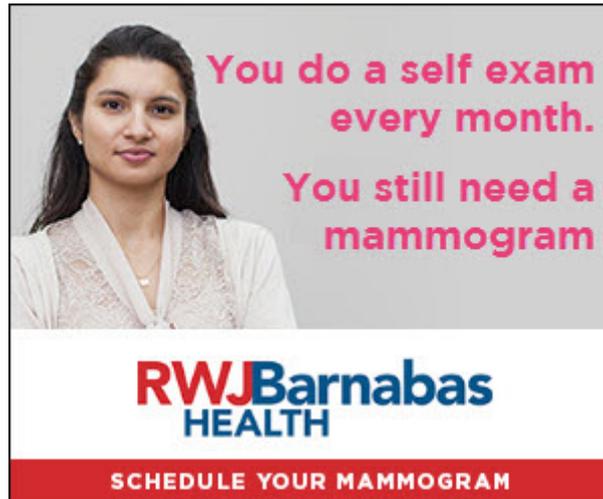


Lawmakers in New Jersey are pushing two separate sets of bills to bolster oversight and regulation of dog groomers after reports of deaths. (Andre Malok | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

By [Sophie Nieto-Munoz and Alex Napoliello](#) | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com i

New Jersey could become the first state in the country to regulate pet groomers after a bill unanimously passed a committee hearing Monday.

The Pet Grooming Licensing Act was pushed through after an [investigation by NJ Advance Media documented dozens of cases of dogs dying](#) shortly or after groomings at PetSmart. Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttie [introduced the bill in 2014](#) .



"Everyone I tell, they're surprised groomers don't require licensing," she said. "There's room for regulation. No one is against safety. It's time to put pets over profits."

The bill, known as Bijou's Law, would establish a Pet Groomers Advisory Committee within the Division of Consumer Affairs and require groomers pass an exam for a license. The groomer would also need to be at least 18 years of age and "be of good moral character."

Bijou's Law, named after a 6-year-old shih tzu that died during a routine grooming at a big box pet salon, is sponsored by Huttle, Assemblywoman Angelica Jimenez and Assemblyman Paul Moriarty.

Sen. Christopher "Kip" Bateman is sponsoring a companion bill in the Senate, which has yet to receive a committee hearing.

Rosemary Marchetto, Bijou's owner, testified to committee members that her goal is to make it mandatory for groomers to be licensed across the country, but said she's proud to see New Jersey taking the first step.

"I'm elated the state assembly sees and recognizes the need for dog grooming to be a regulated, licensed industry," Marchetto said. "This has been four years in the making, but it's well worth it knowing New Jersey dogs will be safer at groomers."

Other states, such as Colorado, require grooming facilities and private groomers to register with state agencies, providing some oversight of what is largely an unregulated industry.

While groomers who spoke at the committee meeting said they mostly supported what the bill calls for, they expressed concern about the financial burden of licensing and the credentials of the oversight committee members. Some groomers said education and consumer transparency should be the focus.

"We want to get rid of those bad apples but legislation won't enforce that. The license is only as good as the integrity of the holder," said Lisa Correia, a pet groomer and educator.

Huttle said the renewed interest [in the bill](#) came after NJ Advance Media's expansive investigation into PetSmart, the nation's leading pet-retailer. Similar bills have [also been introduced](#).

The report documented [47 cases of dogs dying during or shortly after PetSmart groomings](#) during the past decade. But that's hardly a definitive number as most groomers are not required to publicly report deaths.

The probe revealed the company has offered affected families money, sometimes as little as a few hundred dollars, in exchange for non-disclosure agreements. In

addition, former employees [detailed allegations of inadequate training and intense pressure to grow profits](#) .

PetSmart -- which operates more than 1,600 stores in the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico -- fiercely defended its safety record and denies wrongdoing.

"As a company of pet lovers who are dedicated to the health and happiness of all pets, we empathize with these grieving families," it said in [a statement](#) .

"Nevertheless, we are not aware of any evidence suggesting that PetSmart services caused the deaths of these pets."

[[Read the company's full response to the investigation](#)]

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