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Vainieri Huttle, Jimenez, Moriarty "Bijou's Law" Bill Clears Assembly Committee

Also Known As "Pet Grooming Licensing Act," Would License Pet Groomers; Dog's Death Prompted Legislation

To prevent tragic loss such as Bijou's, a healthy Shih Tzu who died unexpectedly under the care of a pet groomer, Assembly Democrats Valerie Vainieri Huttle, Angelica Jimenez and Paul D. Moriarty sponsored a bill (A-3044) that would establish the "Pet Groomers Licensing Act," or "Bijou's Law" in honor of the puppy. The legislation was approved Monday by the Assembly Regulated Professions Committee.

"Americans spent 5.4 billion dollars on pet boarding and grooming services this year. Until now, progress has been slow in regulating a business that has remained unchecked since its inception," said Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttle (D-Bergen). "An investigation by NJ Advance Media has documented 47 cases across 14 states since 2008 in which families claim they took their dog to the nation's leading pet retailer for a grooming, which includes everything from nail clipping to a haircut, only to have it die during or shortly after the visit."

The original legislation was introduced in 2014 by Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttle in response to the untimely death of Bijou, who died during a routine grooming at a pet salon when he was only six years old.

The bill calls for the licensing of pet groomers and the registration of certain businesses. It is intended to ensure that all dog groomers in New Jersey are trained and licensed to properly care for the state's pets which include more than 500,000 dogs.

"We must establish regulations that require anyone grooming a dog to be licensed and that the businesses offering grooming services be registered and monitored," said Jimenez (D-Bergen, Hudson). "There can be no other option. This is the only way that we can ensure that dogs are cared for and treated humanely while being groomed. It is what they deserve and nothing less."

The bill would establish a Pet Groomers Advisory Committee within the Division of Consumer Affairs in the Department of Law and Public Safety. Members would consist of three licensed pet groomers, one licensed veterinarian, and three public members. The bill defines grooming as, but not limited to, bathing, brushing, clipping, or styling a pet.

The bill would mandate that:

- To be licensed as a pet groomer, an applicant be at least 18 years old, of good moral character, and pass an examination.

- The Director of the Division of Consumer Affairs in the Department of Law and Public Safety review the qualifications of an applicant, ensure standards of the examination and continuing education, and issue, renew and suspend or revoke licenses to pet groomers and schools.
- All licenses be issued for a two-year period and renewed by filing an application and paying a fee.
- A business offering pet grooming services be registered and provide proof of general liability insurance.
- Pet grooming businesses meet safety and environmental standards such as caging, lighting, sanitation, and the provision of water.
- Every pet grooming business maintain a pet incident file that is submitted annually to the Director of Consumer Affairs including pet injuries, severe illnesses, deaths and pet escapes.
- The State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners establish and implement a public awareness campaign to educate and inform New Jersey consumers about Bijou's Law. This Board also would provide a toll-free telephone number for consumers making inquiries or complaints regarding pet groomers and pet grooming businesses.

"While we can't bring Bijou back, we can do our best to prevent deaths like his from occurring," said Moriarty. "We owe it to Bijou, his family and to the pet owners throughout our state."

The bill now heads to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

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