Proposed Senate Bill 969: Negative Consequences for Consumers, Pets, and Small Businesses

When was the last time you requested that a business owner keep his certifications and credentials to himself? It isn’t every day that Californians entrust their cars, homes or medical care to people who, by law, have to hide their diplomas or certifications, but pretty soon, you might be taking your dogs to professionals who have to do just that – pretend they don’t have any.

In an attempt to regulate an already self-regulating industry, California lawmakers drafted Senate Bill 969 establishing a voluntary pet groomer certificate program by the state. The legislation notes that the certification program is voluntary, good enough. The problem is, responsible, trained pet groomers who do not wish to participate in the voluntary program, will no longer be able to advertise their professional certifications – and that translates into lost business. Groomers certified by the National Dog Groomers Association, International Professional Groomers, and other professional training organizations would no longer be able to disclose their professional certifications. Why don’t we just assume that if you received your Masters Degree in another state, that if you move to California, you can chuck that diploma in the drawer, too. Is the State of California now telling us that the government understands the training, nuances and intricacies of dog grooming better than these distinguished trade organizations?

Moreover, those with actual expertise in the area of pet grooming were not asked to participate in the crafting of the bill; therefore there was no input about proper standards of care. SB 969 does not establish proper standards of care. Instead, it gives broad discretion to a newly created Council to certify groomer training. Members of this Council may not necessarily have any expertise in animal grooming standards themselves.

The bill establishes a non-profit council to oversee the certification program, but fails to provide adequate funding to operate the council. Without an initial base of groomers to fund the start-up of the program, questions about the viability of the program loom. The costs of database set-up and management, online registry, program development, office expenses, administrative costs, compliance checks, and investigative costs far exceed the revenue anticipated from the two-year fees for certification.

Few grooming professionals will participate in the proposed state certification program because of the potential liabilities imposed by arbitrary grooming standards enforced by a voluntary board. If groomers are unwilling or unable to participate in this program, additional costs to the state would be incurred such as reduced tax revenue and unemployment compensation when self-employed residents and small businesses go out of business. California currently ranks 3rd in the nation in unemployment with 10.8% of the population out of work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May and June 2012). The excessive restrictions and liability imposed by this bill could drive quality, experienced groomers out of business and add to these unemployment figures.

The proposed program gives consumers the false impression that their pets are safer with a state-certified groomer; however the bill does not establish any standards for the protection of animals. It actually limits consumers’ ability to identify highly trained, qualified professionals by prohibiting such groomers from advertising their credentials. The industry strongly supports good legislation that protects animals. While we did have some support from the legislature, there are further amendments that could be added to make this legislation better for pets and better for businesses in California. We would welcome the opportunity to work with a sponsor on legislation that would set standards and improve the safety of grooming salons.

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