

Mandatory Licensing in Dog Grooming:

A Systems-Level Analysis of Accessibility, Workforce Sustainability, and Canine Welfare Outcomes

Sasha Riess¹

¹ Pure Love & Harmony Institute, Arlington, Texas, United States

Corresponding Author:

Sasha Riess, Pure Love & Harmony Institute, Arlington, Texas, United States.

Email: sasha@plhschool.com

Executive Summary

The Dog Grooming industry is in a state of rapid change and as public concern about the safety, professionalism, and standards of dog welfare continue to grow, new governmental mandates come into discussion for the licensing of dog groomers. This white paper argues that the unintended impact of such licensing could be to create new welfare issues by limiting access to professional Dog Grooming services, exacerbating staff shortages, escalating service pricing and driving additional factors contributing to the wider systemic issues that impact the welfare of dogs, pet-owning households and animal shelter systems.

The irony of mandatory licensing in Dog Grooming is that legislation designed to benefit dogs' welfare can actually have the opposite effect, limiting access to preventative care, raising the cost of pet ownership, decreasing the available number of Dog Grooming providers, and leading to more neglect, shelter adoptions and suffering among the very dogs these measures are meant to protect.

Industry statistics show that there is a significant mismatch in the number of dogs that need to have their coats cared for regularly, with the number of professionals capable of providing this coat care. There are currently about 162,000 to 185,000 firms that employ about 300,000 people in the Pet Grooming and Boarding industry in the United States, while the country has about 90 million dogs (APPA, 2025; IBISWorld, 2026). At the same time, market data indicates that only a small percentage of dog-owning households regularly access dog grooming services from professionals, thus leaving millions of dogs with some or no access to preventative pet grooming.

This paper contends that compulsory licensing regimes can lead to an unintended adverse effect on this imbalance, by adding licensing impediments such as licensing fees, educational expenses. Inspection compliance, legal requirements, continuing education requirements and insurance escalation. These pressures can be especially significant for independent Dog Grooming businesses, home-based Dog Grooming businesses, mobile Dog Grooming businesses, and small operators.

Importantly, this paper suggests that the lack of access to professional Dog Grooming services should not be considered simply as an inconvenience to the consumer but more as an animal welfare concern. Failure to provide timely and appropriate preventative care for the coat can lead to

progressive matting, skin disease, chronic pain, behavioural problems, more veterinary visits and owner frustration. These factors can indirectly play a role in shelter relinquishment and euthanasia risk, especially in already overcrowded animal welfare systems, in severe cases.

It also states that the future evolution of the Dog Grooming Industry must transcend the industry narratives that are driven by appearance and mainly about before-and-after transformations. Rather, we suggest that professional standards are evolving and that trauma-aware, welfare-focused, behaviourally driven practices are gaining prominence and are more likely to be part of the measures used to assess professional excellence in the context of the Dog Grooming process.

This white paper does not speak out against education or professional development but vehemently supports:

- voluntary advanced education,
- mentorship-based learning,
- Introduction to dog handling and safety, and
- trauma-aware handling systems,
- low-stress behavioral approaches,
- transparent consumer education,

Accountability mechanisms that remain accessible and promote meaningful professional development that are based on the market. We call on the professional Dog Grooming community, policy makers, educators and industry leaders to thoughtfully examine whether more regulation will lead to the most sustainable solution for better canine care, or if the future of the industry will require the development of accessible, scientifically and ethically aware, emotionally intelligent and welfare-conscious systems of care that will benefit dogs and those who care for them.

1. Abstract

This trend toward compulsory licensing in the Dog Grooming industry has come about because of valid concerns about safety, accountability, professionalism and animal welfare. We suggest however that the discussion on regulation must go beyond compliance-based frameworks to include a broader systems level analysis. Education, ethics and professional development are still crucial to the future of Dog Grooming, but government licensing could also have unintended consequences such as limiting access to care, exacerbating worker shortages, driving consolidation, raising service fees, and ultimately having a negative impact on dogs' welfare (Kleiner & Krueger, 2013).

This white paper looks at the changing function of Dog Grooming in today's companion animal care and proposes that Dog Grooming should no longer be considered as a cosmetic service but rather as a holistic part of preventative welfare, behavior regulation, skin and coat health management and support for human-animal relationships. We also envision a future in which the emphasis changes from the appearance-based industry narrative to one centered on the welfare, emotional, and physiological aspects of a dog's experience of care, and in which the emotional and physiological aspects are central to the standards of care the Dog Grooming industry should live by.

This paper examines, through interdisciplinary analysis, the industry statistics, occupational workforce dynamics, animal welfare literature and literature from the canine stress physiology, economic accessibility models, and field experience, how excessive regulatory systems may have the unintended consequence of limiting access to professional Dog Grooming services for millions of households who are already facing rising pet care costs. We also explore how reduced access could exacerbate coat neglect, behavioral issues, shelter abandonment and risk of euthanasia in vulnerable populations of dogs.

We do not call for eliminating education or standards, we call on the Professional Dog Grooming Community to look at other routes that involve voluntary education, mentorship, the Integrative & Holistic Dog Grooming models, trauma-aware approaches, transparent education of consumers and market-driven accountability systems that will allow for innovation and accessibility (Reuters, 2024). Public trust is not just measured by the display of bureaucratic behavior, but also by

competent performance, ethical conduct, transparent communication, and professional culture that is oriented towards providing for well-being.

Keywords

Dog Grooming, Integrative & Holistic Dog Grooming, canine welfare, occupational licensing, trauma-aware Dog Grooming, canine stress physiology, professional accessibility, animal shelter intake, Dog Grooming workforce, preventative canine care.

2. Introduction

The Dog Grooming industry is in the midst of a major paradigm shift in its philosophy and structure. Professional Dog Grooming is often viewed primarily as a cosmetic service, but is now a much more intricate part of the larger dog care field. As contemporary knowledge of canine behavior, stress physiology, skin barrier function, coat biology, attachment theory, and emotional regulation has slowly emerged, the experience of the dog during his/her professional Dog Grooming can have repercussions beyond appearances (Beerda et al., 1998; Dreschel & Granger, 2009).

At the same time, public worry about animal safety in Dog Grooming has fuelled the debate on required government licensing and formal regulation of the Dog Grooming trade. This is a sensible worry, but we feel that the discussion so far is not finished as it tends to only discuss the compliance frameworks and not the full downstream impacts of regulatory growth that may result in an already stressed care environment (Jenkins, 2025).

As per American Pet Products Association (2025), Today, there are about 90 million dogs and 69 million to almost 70 million households in the United States, and roughly 162,000 to 185,000 business establishments in the Pet Grooming and Boarding industry employing approximately 300,000 Dog Grooming professionals. The numbers tell us that there are accessibility barriers already in place before any further growth of government regulation (IBISWorld, 2026).

The question we propose here is then not whether education and professional standards are important, but rather how they are important. It is then not just whether education and professional standards are important, but how much. Instead, the question is whether the strict licensing regime

from government is the optimal and sustainable method to promote Dog Welfare and retain access, workforce viability, innovation and diversity in the Dog Grooming industry (Scheduling Kit, 2026).

3. Literature Review and Background

Historically, occupations are licensed in industries that have been related to public health or technical risk or consumer protection. As with most things in this world, though, the research in occupational economics suggests that licensing regimes tend to raise the cost of consumers, limit flexibility of the workforce, restrict the supply side, and drive market concentration, especially in industries dominated by small independent operators (Kleiner & Krueger, 2013).

In the area of Dog Grooming, there has been an increased focus on professional regulation due to incidents in which animals have been injured or killed while under the care of a professional. Jenkins (2025) suggests that certain educational systems and professional certification might help to build public trust and safety in Dog Grooming. Yet, many of the same publications are based on the idea that better regulation is associated with better welfare outcomes, and little direct empirical evidence exists to support this in the companion animal service industries.

At the same time, the Dog Grooming sector has undergone significant change with the development of canine behavioural and welfare research. Research on canine stress physiology has shown that multiple and frequent exposure to unpredictable handling, environments with high restraint, higher sensory stimuli, and emotionally dysregulated interactions can cause activation, sensitization, and a defensive behavioral reaction to stress patterns (Beerda et al., 1998). Dreschel and Granger (2009) also showed how useful salivary cortisol was in assessing the stress response of a dog in an environmental handling situation.

As a result, there has been a rise in the number of people that have become interested in trauma-aware and Integrative & Holistic Dog Grooming methods that focus on predictability, low stress handling, regulation of the nervous system, and individual pacing.

4.0 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach to a systems-based model that combines occupational economics, canine stress physiology, welfare science, attachment theory and Integrative & Holistic Dog Grooming philosophy. This way of thinking about Dog Grooming is a way of understanding that professional Dog Grooming is not just a cosmetic service, but a way of thinking about the relationship and the physiology between dogs, pet parents, Dog Grooming professionals, veterinary systems, shelters, economy and the narrative to the public.

A lack of access to professional Dog Grooming can lead to further matting, skin disease, behavioral issues, and owner exhaustion, which could impact rates of relinquishment and long-term well-being.

We also suggest that the beauty products within Dog Grooming should not be thought of as stand alone goals that are separate from the processes of caring for welfare. Instead, naturally successful aesthetic results are most likely to be sustainable as they are a natural byproduct of systems valuing physiological regulation, emotional predictability, behavioral safety, and respectful handling.

5.0 Main Analysis

5.1 Workforce Limitation and Accessibility Pressure

Historically, occupations are licensed in industries that have been related to public health or technical risk or consumer protection. As with most things in this world, though, the research in occupational economics suggests that licensing regimes tend to raise the cost of consumers, limit flexibility of the workforce, restrict the supply side, and drive market concentration, especially in industries dominated by small independent operators (Kleiner & Krueger, 2013).

In the area of Dog Grooming, there has been an increased focus on professional regulation due to incidents in which animals have been injured or killed while under the care of a professional. Jenkins (2025) suggests that certain educational systems and professional certification might help to build public trust and safety in Dog Grooming. Yet, many of the same publications are based on the idea that better regulation is associated with better welfare outcomes, and little direct empirical evidence exists to support this in the companion animal service industries.

Table 1.

Intended Benefits and Potential Unintended Consequences of Mandatory Licensing in Dog Grooming

Dimension	Intended Benefit of Mandatory Licensing	Potential Unintended Consequence	Supporting Source
Workforce supply	Filters out underqualified groomers and raises baseline competency across the profession.	Restricts entry into the trade, worsening existing shortages relative to a U.S. population of ~90 million dogs served by only ~300,000 groomers.	Kleiner & Krueger (2013); APPA (2025); IBISWorld (2026)
Service cost & accessibility	Standardised training and oversight justify higher, more uniform service pricing.	Licensing, education, insurance, and inspection costs are passed to consumers, pricing low- and middle-income households out of preventative grooming.	Kleiner & Krueger (2013); Reuters (2024)
Small, mobile, and home-based operators	Establishes a level playing field and consistent safety standards across all business models.	Compliance burden falls disproportionately on independents and mobile groomers, driving market consolidation toward larger corporate chains.	Kleiner & Krueger (2013); Scheduling Kit (2026)
Canine welfare (direct)	Reduces incidents of injury or death during grooming through enforced competency	Limited empirical evidence that licensing improves welfare outcomes in companion-animal service sectors.	Jenkins (2025)
Canine welfare (indirect)	Professionalisation encourages adoption of safer handling and hygiene practices.	Reduced access leads to progressive matting, skin disease, behavioural decline, and increased shelter relinquishment risk.	Beerda et al. (1998); Dreschel & Granger (2009)
Stress and trauma-aware handling	Mandated curricula could incorporate low-stress handling and canine behaviour modules.	Compliance-based training tends to emphasise technical and aesthetic skill over trauma-aware, behaviourally informed practice.	Beerda et al. (1998); Dreschel & Granger (2009)
Public trust & accountability	Government registration offers consumers a verifiable assurance of professional standing.	Bureaucratic credentialing can substitute for, rather than reflect, genuine ethical practice and transparent communication.	Jenkins (2025); Kleiner & Krueger (2013)
Enforcement & implementation	Provides a clear legal framework for investigating incidents and disciplining negligent operators.	Even after legislation passes, enforcement gaps can persist for years, leaving the sector functionally unregulated.	Times of Malta (2024)
International comparison	Aligns national practice with countries (e.g., parts of Asia) where groomer licensing is established.	Most major grooming markets globally operate without mandatory state licensing yet maintain strong voluntary certification cultures.	Hosler (2019)
Alternative pathways	Licensing creates a single, enforceable standard of professional entry.	Voluntary certification, mentorship, trauma-aware training, and market-driven accountability may achieve comparable welfare gains without restricting access.	Jenkins (2025); Hosler (2019)

5.2 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach to a systems-based model that combines occupational economics, canine stress physiology, welfare science, attachment theory and Integrative & Holistic Dog Grooming philosophy. This way of thinking about Dog Grooming is a way of understanding that professional Dog Grooming is not just a cosmetic service, but a way of thinking about the relationship and the physiology between dogs, pet parents, Dog Grooming professionals, veterinary systems, shelters, economy and the narrative to the public.

A lack of access to professional Dog Grooming can lead to further matting, skin disease, behavioral issues, and owner exhaustion, which could impact rates of relinquishment and long-term well-being.

We also suggest that the beauty products within Dog Grooming should not be thought of as stand alone goals that are separate from the processes of caring for welfare. Instead, naturally successful aesthetic results are most likely to be sustainable as they are a natural byproduct of systems valuing physiological regulation, emotional predictability, behavioral safety, and respectful handling.

5.3 Problem Statement

In the Dog Grooming industry, the push for licensing is primarily aimed at enhancing professional standards and curbing negative incidents. But we think that the current discourse is missing systemic impacts excessive regulation might have in an industry already plagued with workforce shortages, increased costs, professional burnout, and reduced public engagement.

The Dog Grooming industry currently caters to a canine population that is nearing 90 million dogs, but has relatively small workforce and infrastructure (APPA, 2025; IBISWorld, 2026). The cost of services and the participation of staff in professional dog grooming have a profound impact on dogs with neglected coat conditions, deteriorating behavior, missed medical treatment opportunities, and relinquishment risk; even small changes in the cost of services or the number of staff using these

services can substantially increase the number of at-risk dogs with neglected coat conditions.

Also, often industry culture itself promotes appearance-based standards by using social media to tell stories of transformation before and after photos, and not explaining the emotional and physical journey that the dog takes while being cared for.

6.0 Reframing Professional Standards Around Canine Experience

A paradigm shift might also be needed in the Dog Grooming industry. In the world of modern marketing, it is often the visual change that is emphasized and the emotional and physiological journey of the dog is overlooked in the process of caring. The algorithms of social media have a strong preference for dramatic before/after displays, and can be conducive to outcome-focused models that are separate from process-focused evaluation based on welfare.

The credibility and progression of Dog Grooming should progressively be based on the ability to show a structured, trauma-informed, behaviourally informed process which focuses on creating predictability, emotional safety, nervous system regulation, low stress handling, consent aware interaction, environmental management and pacing of individual care for dogs. Instead, beauty as a natural byproduct of organized systems of care for canine wellness.

Thus, the question is not "how beautiful was the last haircut?" but, "what was the dog's total experience during the entire Dog Grooming process?"

7.0 Conclusion

Dog Grooming is at a pivotal moment in the trajectory of professional growth, public responsibility, and animal welfare, while also facing challenges in the availability of services. We see it as also being important to discuss regulation beyond the simple point that licensing will inevitably lead to safer or more ethical outcomes, as the industry continues to evolve from cosmetic presentation to a much more integrated approach, involving an understanding of behaviour, stress physiology, emotional regulation, skin and coat health and trauma aware handling.

In this paper we have argued that the debate on mandatory licensing of Dog Grooming should not be limited to the professional oversight aspect but should also be viewed at a more general systems level in relation to workforce sustainability, economic accessibility, market diversity, public education, shelter dynamics and long-term canine welfare outcomes. The fact is that the present Professional Dog Grooming infrastructure is already proving that only a small percentage of dogs that need to be groomed regularly are getting it. At the same time the industry is suffering from a shortage of personnel, physical and emotional exhaustion, an increase in costs of operation and increasing behavioral complexity of the dogs that have been presented to the professional Dog Grooming industry since the social and environmental changes we have seen due to Covid-19.

In this context, unnecessary regulatory overgrowth can paradoxically lead to fewer Dog Grooming entrepreneurs entering—or staying in—the profession, higher prices for pet owners, and less access for millions of home-dwelling dog and cat owners. We feel this is a very serious issue as inaccessibility to Dog Grooming preventative care isn't all about looks. It can lead to progressive coat neglect, behavioral decline, medical issues, owner surrender, shelter intake and, in extreme cases, euthanasia for those dogs that are already at risk for entering into an overloaded shelter system.

What is important to note about this paper, however, is the fact that there is no argument against education, ethical standards, accountability, or professional development. We are, however, extremely supportive of the professionalization of education in Dog Grooming and feel the future of the industry has improved through more intensive studies of dog behavior, nervous system regulation, low stress handling, trauma awareness, dermatology, nutrition and Integrative & Holistic Dog Grooming methods. We believe that much more can be achieved through a combination of voluntary excellence, mentorship, open education of the public and welfare-oriented professional culture instead of only by a bureaucratic force.

We also call upon the Dog Grooming industry itself to critically review the standards it holds and would like to see recognized. We believe the profession is in danger of perpetuating appearance-focused narratives in a world that is more and more driven by algorithms to create “before and after” images, with little regard to the lived physiological and emotional experiences of the dog in the

course of being cared for. The final measure of the credibility of Dog Grooming may not be how much a dog looks different after the appointment, but how safe, respectful, predictable and compassionate the dog was treated during the grooming. Under this wider lens, Beauty is no longer seen as an end in itself, as it is intertwined with welfare.

We hope the policymakers, educators, industry leaders and Dog Grooming professionals alike carefully consider whether the future of dog care lies with more and more layers of bureaucracy, or with a more open, scientifically proficient, emotionally intelligent and welfare focused professional culture that will support the dogs and the humans who care for them.

8.0 References

- American Pet Products Association. (2025). *Industry trends and pet ownership statistics*. <https://www.americanpetproducts.org/research-insights/industry-trends-and-future-outlook>
- Beerda, B., Schilder, M. B. H., van Hooff, J. A. R. A. M., de Vries, H. W., & Mol, J. A. (1998). Behavioural, saliva cortisol and heart rate responses to different types of stimuli in dogs. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 58(3–4), 365–381. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0168-1591\(97\)00145-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0168-1591(97)00145-7)
- Dreschel, N. A., & Granger, D. A. (2009). Methods of collection for salivary cortisol measurement in dogs. *Hormones and Behavior*, 55(1), 163–168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yhbeh.2008.09.010>
- Hosler, K. (2019, January 13). Grooming around the globe. *Groomer to Groomer Magazine*. <https://www.groomertogroomer.com/grooming-around-the-globe/>
- IBISWorld. (2026). *Pet grooming & boarding industry report*. <https://www.ibisworld.com/united-states/industry/pet-grooming-boarding/1342/>
- Jenkins, J. B. (2025). Professional certification and standards in the dog grooming industry. *Grooming Industry Publication*.
- Kleiner, M. M., & Krueger, A. B. (2013). Analyzing the extent and influence of occupational licensing on the labor market. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 31(S1), S173–S202. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669060>
- Reuters. (2024, September 10). *Three ways to manage surging pet care costs*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/three-ways-manage-surging-pet-care-costs-2024-09-10/>
- Scheduling Kit. (2026). *Pet grooming industry statistics*. <https://www.schedulingkit.com/pet-grooming-industry-statistics>
- Times of Malta. (2024). *Pet groomers still unlicensed two years after new safety law*. <https://timesofmalta.com/>

1.