

Groups push for state licensing of professional dog trainers

Model legislation is intended to protect consumers from unqualified trainers, according to associations that launched campaign, website

By Daniel Tyson

Two associations have joined forces to work toward licensing professional dog trainers but concede it will be a tough battle getting legislation passed nationwide.

The Alliance for Professionalism in Dog Training was created to advocate for state legislation. The Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers and the Association of Professional Dog Trainers founded the Alliance.

A few states have expressed interest. The group is currently working with a New Jersey state legislator to introduce a licensure bill. Lawmakers in California and Illinois have reached out to the association for information.

"We're hoping if one or two states can get on board it will make other states eager to replicate some of those initiatives," said Bradley Phifer, executive director of CCPDT.



Heidi Meinzer, a board member of the Association of Professional Dog Trainers, works with a canine.

Licensing for a broad range of professions has expanded across the U.S. over the last several decades. Nearly one-fourth of all workers in the U.S. hold an occupational license issued by a state, federal or local government, according to data released by the Bureau of Labor in 2015.

Along with that surge in licensing has also come concerns about decreased competition and increased costs. The pushback has led to efforts in some states to reduce the number of occupations that require a license.

Phifer explained that model legislation drafted by the Alliance is intended to protect consumers and dogs from unqualified trainers. The licensing fee would be limited to cover the cost of a nine-member dog training licensure board. Members of the board, under the model, would be residents of the state and include certified dog trainers, a dog behavior consultant, a veterinarian, former and current

dog owners and a member of nonprofit animal welfare groups.

Under the model legislation, license-seekers must be certified through an approved certification program. Any independent dog training certification organization can apply to be an approved program if they agree to abide by the joint standards, code of ethics, compliant training methods and require members to continue education after receiving a license.

CCPDT says it is "the leading independent testing and certification for dog training and behavior professionals." The Association of Professional Dog Trainers offers webinars and online certificate courses.

"One of the reasons that we exist as an organization is to provide consumer protection to make sure that people who are providing services to the public have the demonstrated competence and are held accountable to continuing education and adherence to the standards of practice," Phifer said.

The Alliance's founders have spent "tens of thousands" of dollars on the project. The CCPDT and APDT have created a website with sources, including videos for their combined 10,000 members.

Phifer said the initiative has "overwhelming support" for its members. "I'd say between 85-90% of members are in favor of licensing," he said. ■

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