



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

Fishy Feet

JEFFREY D. KLEIN October 16, 2009

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Klein Investigation Finds Dangerous Fish Pedicure Practices

Unveils Legislation to Protect Consumer's Health and Wallets

NEW YORK - Senator and Deputy Majority Leader Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester) joined by New York Department of State District Manager for Enforcement Jack Bilello and the NY League of Humane Voters Executive Director John Phillips exposed the dirty and dangerous practice of “fish pedicures,” discreetly infiltrating nail salons throughout NYC in front of the Ritz Nail & Spa in Astoria, Queens on Monday. Klein's investigation found that the practice is a new trend quietly becoming more popular in salons in Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan. Klein also unveiled legislation that would ban the unsanitary and inhumane practice statewide.

“This practice is starting to become more popular in the backrooms of salons around the city,” said Klein. “Women may think it’s the latest in luxury nail treatment but it’s not. Fish pedicures are dirty and dangerous and a serious risk to one’s health. I want to put an end to this hazardous practice before it becomes the next big trend.”

Klein's office discovered that Ritz Nail & Spa offered Fish Pedicures by conducting an undercover sting operation. Representatives from Klein's office went into the salon earlier this month and asked if they offered the service. The owner confirmed that the salon did offer fish pedicures ranging in price from \$35 to \$50 dollars. He then showed the Klein representative the salon's MySpace page which featured pictures of fish pedicures. The link to the MySpace page is as follows: <http://www.myspace.com/ritznails>, under the “photos” section.

Klein's office further investigated the practice and discovered that fish pedicures are considered unsanitary and can negatively affect a person's health by spreading fungal and bacterial infections. The study also exposes the inhumane ways salons get the fish to bite dead skin off the feet of customers.

Small cuts or lesions in a foot caused by a fish pedicure can become infected by aggressive bacteria such as Staph or even MRSA, and such infections can be fatal. To decrease the risk of infections, states across the country have implemented strict rules on sanitation and sterilization of equipment used during standard pedicures. However, it is impossible to sanitize or sterilize all the fish used in this unique treatment. A typical fish pedicure treatment uses hundreds of Garra Rufa fish.

Also used are Chin Chin fish, which pose an even greater risk of spreading bacterial infections since they can grow teeth. Chin Chin fish can bite hard enough to draw blood, possibly creating a pathway for dangerous bacteria to enter the bloodstream.

"These fish pedicures add exponentially to potentials for infections through these portals. The active biological 'soup' in the living environment of fish includes *Pseudomonas*, *Mycobacterium fortuitum*, both are serious pathogens for individuals with micro trauma. Imagine the *E. coli* and other fecal contaminants that are introduced into the feet of these clients through the non-chlorinated water in which these fish reside. My advice as a

podiatrist is that any person having these pedicures is playing Russian roulette with their health and these services should be ruled unlawful for the safety of the public,” said Dr. Bob Spalding, a Doctor of Podiatric Medicine & Author of Death by Pedicure.

Klein’s study also points to the inhumanity of fish pedicure practices. Well-fed Garra Rufa fish do not actively feed on dead human skin which means in order for a fish pedicure to be effect, the fish must be kept at a certain level of starvation. The Garra Rufa and Chin Chin fish also need warm waters to thrive which would require a hefty financial investment for any store to keep thousands of fish healthy.

NYS Secretary of State Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez said, “I want to thank Senator Klein for bringing this issue to our attention. I look forward to working with Senator Klein to ensure that all twenty-thousand appearance and enhancement business in New York are safe and healthy places of business. We will now be reviewing the practice of the fish-pedicure in New York.”

In light of the study’s findings, Klein proposed new legislation that would ban fish pedicures across New York State. It would also impose a maximum \$250 fine for the first offense and make subsequent offenses a class B misdemeanor. The bill (S6205) has an effective date of 180 days.

"The health and safety of salon patrons must always be of paramount concern, and this practice raises significant questions about proper disinfection techniques and the possibility of the spread of disease between customers," said Senator George Onorato (D-Queens). "I commend Senator Klein for his commitment to the public health, and share his concern that New York follow the lead of other states around the nation and blow this particular practice out of the water."

At least 14 other states have already banned fish pedicures including Maine, Texas, Florida, Massachusetts and New Jersey. The International Nail Technicians Association, an organization that represents nail technicians, opposes the procedure.

Fish Pedicures trace back to Turkey where small fish, called Garra Rufas, were known to attack the skin of swimmers in water. The fish chose to eat dead skin due to the lack of plankton they usually eat. Japan picked up on the idea, importing Garra Rufa fish to their spas and using them as exfoliating agents. The practice spread to China and Singapore where another species of fish became popular because they were cheaper. These fish, called Chin Chin, can grow teeth and they can grow significantly larger than the Garra Rufa. In mid-2008, a salon owner in Virginia brought this practice to the United States, calling them "Dr. Fish" Pedicures.

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