



CIRCUIT COURT FOR ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

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We are happy to provide support for Senate Bill 101 and are excited to share some facts as to why the bill should be expanded to all counties in the state. Thank you for allowing us to lend our continued support for the Court Dog program. We know this program is supported by the Maryland Judiciary and our Administrative Judge Laura Ripken.

We officially kicked off our Court Dog program on February 8, 2018. At that event, we swore in 12 Court Dogs and their handlers who are part of the Caring Canines program created by Dogwood Acres Pet Retreat. Today we have 19 volunteer teams actively in the program. Each dog and handler team must pass extensive training and receive certification through Pet Partners to be approved as a therapy animal and thus able to participate in the Court Dog program.

Since the program began, requests for a therapy dog have significantly increased. In 2018 we had 4 requests for a Court Dog, in 2019 we had 15 requests, and already in 2020, we have had 2 requests for a therapy dog. Most of these requests are for Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) cases and custody cases. However, last year, we were able to use a therapy dog for the first time to comfort a child on the witness stand in a criminal case. There have been multiple requests prior to this to support a child providing witness testimony however, those cases reached a plea agreement prior to the child testifying.

The program has also been able to support children through multiple hearing appearances. In these instances, the children have requested the same dog to be present at their next court hearing which has been an irreplaceable support for the children to have a familiar furry face accompanying them in court. Some of these cases involved children who have been abused, neglected, or have a developmental disability or mental disorder. In one such instance, the child's parents had both recently passed away and the child needed to be placed in foster care.

A hearing was held to determine the next steps in that process and one of our Court Dogs provided unwavering support for this child during such a difficult time. This was one of the cases the child was able to have the same therapy dog present at their next court hearing. This is just one example of how the program helps children cope with unbearable situations and circumstances.

These are just a handful of the success stories our Court Dog program has been able to foster. We are writing to let you know that it works and that we support the continuation of the program and to expand it statewide.

Thank you.

Articles of support:

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/anne-arundel/ac-cn-comfort-dog-court-1115-20191115-lyb6a6ee2rbgza3v7jmoowpswu-story.html>

<https://wjla.com/news/local/comfort-dog-court-children-testify>

<https://wtop.com/animals-pets/2019/11/md-court-allows-support-dog-for-1st-time-during-girls-testimony/>

<https://www.wbal.com/article/maryland-court-allows-support-dogs-during-testimony-for-first-time-anne-arundel-county/29783772>

<https://mdcourts.gov/media/newsitem/2018/item20180328>