



The Worcester County Child Advocacy Center

**Senate Bill 101
Judiciary Committee
Court Dogs and Child Witness Protection
** SUPPORT WITH AMMENDMENTS**
January 9, 2020**

The CRICKET Center, Worcester County child advocacy center (CAC), supports Senate Bill 101 with amendments to include training for therapy dogs which is comparable to facility/assistance dog training. This bill allows a child witness to be accompanied by a facility dog which has completed proper training and has been matched with a certified dog handler. Dogs which have graduated from an accredited training program as assistance or facility dogs will be trained to ignore unusual sounds, sights, odors, etc. They are very predictable and will behave appropriately since they and their handlers have already passed the public access requirements. The support of a facility dog (or therapy dog) lessens the trauma a child victim will experience during court proceedings while facing their maltreater.

The CRICKET Center is an accredited member of the National Children's Alliance and the Maryland Children's Alliance. Recognizing the underserved population of Somerset County, The CRICKET Center became the only host/satellite CAC in the State of Maryland. The CRICKET Center provides victims of child abuse with forensic interviews, medical treatment, family advocacy, trauma based therapeutic services and case management in a child-friendly setting by a team of dedicated professionals. There are no fees for any service provided, including medical and mental health intervention.

When children arrive at The CRICKET Center, they are greeted by Josiah, our facility dog. Josiah accompanies child victims during their forensic interviews, during therapy appointments, family involvement meetings, and waits with them prior to testifying in court proceedings. Josiah becomes a bright spot during a dark time for child victims and their families. Having him accompany victims into the courtroom while they testify would lessen the trauma of telling the details of their abuse while facing the person who victimized them. Josiah, a full assistance dog, was trained by Canine Companions for Independence. For the first two years of his life, he completed various levels of preliminary and then advanced training. Josiah knows more than 40 commands and was matched with handler, Wendy Myers in 2018. Wendy was required to attend a two-week advanced training and complete the written and practical exams required to be granted public access. Wendy and Josiah are required to test for ADA recertification annually. Josiah is a reliable and neutral support and has served victims and families without incident.

We hopefully anticipate a favorable response for SB101.

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