



BILL: House Bill 981
TITLE: County Boards of Education – Therapy Dogs – Certification and Use in Schools
HEARING DATE: March 6, 2020
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: Mr. Anthony J. Trotta, Chief Legal Counsel (301-766-2946)
Mrs. Ardath Cade, Legislative Representative (410-991-9383)

The Washington County Board of Education (WCBOE) opposes House Bill 981.

Local boards of education in Maryland, and across the country, are required to accommodate service animals under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). A service animal is defined under the ADA as one that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability.

A therapy dog as defined by House Bill 981 provides “affection and comfort” to a student. The ADA does not recognize a dog as a service animal if the dog’s mere presence provides comfort. However, if the dog is trained to sense an anxiety attack and take specific action to help avoid the attack or lessen its impact, the dog would qualify as a service animal.

Therapy dogs are not considered service animals under the ADA and as such, should not be permitted in a school setting. Only service animals, which do work or perform tasks, should be permitted in a school. Providing “affection and comfort” is simply not enough to allow the use of a therapy dog in a school setting.

WCBOE urges the committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 981.

Thank you.

cc: Washington County Board of Education Members
Washington County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly
Dr. Boyd J. Michael, III, Superintendent
Dr. April Bishop, Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Peggy Pugh, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Jeffrey Proulx, Chief Operating Officer
Mr. John Martirano, Deputy Legal Counsel
Mr. John Woolums, Director of Governmental Relations, Maryland Association of Boards of Education