

February 12, 2024

Mara R. Greengrass  
Rockville, MD 20852

**TESTIMONY ON HB612 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Public Schools - Lifesaver Schools Program - Establishment**

**TO:** Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

**FROM:** Mara Greengrass

**My name is Mara Greengrass. I'm a resident of District 18 and I'm submitting this testimony in support of the Lifesaver Schools Program.**

As a Montgomery County resident for 25 years and a neighbor who cares, I urge you to look favorably on this bill, which would cost the state, counties, and schools nothing, but would enable schools to be certified to bring in therapy animals during stressful times.

When my son returned to summer camp post-COVID, the camp brought in a therapy dog. I'll never forget the photo of my son sitting on the ground petting the dog's stomach, looking up at the camera with the happiest face I think I've ever seen. It was truly an amazing moment that made me feel better too.

I've encountered therapy dogs on other occasions, such as when my parents were dying, and each time I've come away from the experience feeling a little more hopeful about the world.

The Lifesaver Schools designation would allow schools to receive certification and recognition for education and events, and therapy dog visits. Schools are currently able to earn Green School certification or Purple Star recognition in a similar fashion.

This no-cost program will improve the mental health of our children by allowing schools to bring in therapy animals. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB612.**