

SENATE BILL 299

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SB 409/21 – EHE

6lr2084
CF HB 128

By: **Senators Hester, West, Beidle, Kagan, and Lewis Young**

Introduced and read first time: January 21, 2026

Assigned to: Education, Energy, and the Environment

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **County Boards of Education – Therapy Dogs – Policy for Handling and Use in**
3 **Schools**

4 FOR the purpose of requiring each county board of education to allow, subject to certain
5 requirements and policies, the use of therapy dogs in public schools in the county;
6 and generally relating to therapy dogs in public schools.

7 BY adding to
8 Article – Education
9 Section 4–148
10 Annotated Code of Maryland
11 (2025 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

12 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
13 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

14 **Article – Education**

15 **4–148.**

16 **(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS**
17 **INDICATED.**

18 **(2) “HANDLER” MEANS AN INDIVIDUAL WHO PROVIDES CARE AND**
19 **TRAINING FOR A THERAPY DOG.**

20 **(3) “THERAPY DOG” MEANS A DOG THAT IS:**

21 **(I) TRAINED TO PROVIDE AFFECTION AND COMFORT TO**
22 **CHILDREN WHO NEED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN A SCHOOL SETTING; AND**

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 **(II) CERTIFIED OR REGISTERED AS A THERAPY DOG.**

2 **(B) (1) A COUNTY BOARD SHALL ALLOW THE USE OF THERAPY DOGS IN**
3 **PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE COUNTY.**

4 **(2) EACH THERAPY DOG USED IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL SHALL BE**
5 **ACCOMPANIED BY A HANDLER.**

6 **(C) (1) EACH COUNTY BOARD SHALL ADOPT A POLICY FOR THE USE AND**
7 **HANDLING OF THERAPY DOGS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE COUNTY.**

8 **(2) THE POLICY REQUIRED UNDER THIS SUBSECTION SHALL**
9 **INCLUDE:**

10 **(I) LOCAL OR NATIONAL CERTIFICATION OR REGISTRATION**
11 **REQUIREMENTS FOR THERAPY DOGS;**

12 **(II) GUIDELINES FOR HANDLERS OF THERAPY DOGS;**

13 **(III) GUIDELINES FOR WHEN AND WHERE THERAPY DOGS AND**
14 **HANDLERS ARE ALLOWED IN SCHOOL BUILDINGS;**

15 **(IV) NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR PARENTS, STUDENTS,**
16 **AND SCHOOL FACULTY AND STAFF; AND**

17 **(V) GUIDELINES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENTS AND**
18 **STAFF WITH ALLERGIES TO DOGS OR WHO ARE UNCOMFORTABLE AROUND DOGS.**

19 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July
20 1, 2026.