



March 4, 2020

A letter in support of House Bill 981

On behalf of the board and volunteers of Pets on Wheels, Inc. I am writing to register our strongest support for House Bill 981, An Act Concerning County Boards of Education – Therapy Dogs – Certifications and Use in Schools.

At Pets on Wheels, our therapy pets already are working in schools around the state – 53 schools are currently active Pets on Wheels facility partners. Our therapy pet teams visit these schools hundreds of times a year, working with special education classes, helping improve students' literacy skills and making a difference in day to day learning. We develop our therapy pet programs in tandem with the educators and administrators at the schools, and the programs are incredibly successful. Just take a look at some of the comments we've received:

"Thank you so much for sharing your time and wonderful animals. They were so loving and extremely patient with the children. Several of the children were afraid of dogs prior to your visit, but by the end of the program they were so comfortable with your lovely animals that they were holding them in their laps. The ladies were so kind and patient as well. I can't thank you enough for your services." ~ *SS Learning Center Staff*

"Forest and I were volunteering at our regular assignment, a local school for kids with special needs where we visit several times a month. This visit was with the kids we have been visiting with since last school year. Three of them are wheelchair dependent, non-verbal and use electronic communication devices to communicate. One, T, really likes to pet Forest on his head.

On this day, T was having a bad day, crying and having muscle spasms in his arms. I took Forest over to him quietly; T's aide was with him and explained it was too early for him to get his medication. Within 5 minutes of Forest and I gently touching him, his muscles relaxed and his face went from frowning and crying to almost smiling. All of us were so amazed that afterwards we said, did that just happen?

T didn't cry or stretch out his arms the rest of the time we were visiting. This was one of the best visits we've ever had." ~ *Deb Lieberman, PoW Volunteer*

Therapy pets in schools make a positive impact. All Pets on Wheels therapy pet teams have undergone a background check for the human handler, and the pets are required to have annual health exam and certificate signed by a veterinarian submitted and on file, along with bi-annual temperament screenings to ensure that they are suitable for therapy work. Our teams are not a distraction within the schools, but are part of the curriculum in many instances.

Therapy pets can have a positive impact, from the most basic impact on morale to the more profound impact on learning and even on keeping students in school. We encourage the House to pass HB981 to allow even more students to know the benefits of therapy pets in their schools.

Thank you,

Gina Kazimir, Executive Director
Pets on Wheels, Inc.