



HUMANE RESCUE ALLIANCE

Animals. People. Community.

March 3, 2020

Dear Sir/Madam:

This correspondence is in support of HOUSE BILL 981 put forth by Delegates Guyton, Arikan, Bagnall, Hill, Kerr, Lehman, Luedtke, Metzgar, and Ruth permitting therapy dogs in Maryland public schools.

Numerous studies highlight the benefits of therapy dogs in schools. Dogs reduce stress and anxiety, encourage kindness and empathy, and provide social emotional support for students and staff. Therapy dogs are often touted as important visitors in schools after disasters, but they also routinely maintain a significant presence in schools across the region because of their nonjudgmental nature. Dogs are known to have an immediate soothing effect, often helping to deescalate potentially volatile situations.

In my capacity as the Humane Rescue Alliance's Director of Humane Education I often meet well-mannered dogs in local schools. Some of the dogs belong to teachers, principals, counselors, and therapists. In addition, I coordinate dogs' visits to classrooms. Teachers report that students are more eager to come to class when they know that a dog will be present.

I am currently involved in a project that teams PAL (People Animals Love) volunteers and their dogs with below grade level readers. Participating students have developed greater confidence and improved reading skills as a result of their weekly sessions reading to the dogs. One supervising teacher noted that there is a long waiting list of students hoping to participate in the "Ruff Readers" program.

Recruiting therapy dogs to visit schools is a win-win. There is typically no cost involved and the value can easily be measured in students' lowered anxiety levels, greater confidence, and all around happiness. I encourage you to consider the joys and benefits of the proposed HOUSE BILL 981 and support its passage.

Sincerely,

Debbie Duel
Director, Humane Education