

**SB409 testimony\_CallahanPetPartners.pdf**

Uploaded by: Callahan, Mary Margaret

Position: FAV



**Pet Partners**  
*Touching Lives, Improving Health*

As the Chief Mission Officer for Pet Partners, I am pleased to be able to support SB 409 and the benefits of therapy dogs in schools. Established in 1977, Pet Partners is the national leader in demonstrating and promoting the health and wellness benefits of therapy animals. With more than 10,000 registered teams making more than 3 million visits annually, Pet Partners is a respected nonprofit organization registering volunteer therapy animal teams to the most rigorous standards in the industry.

Our therapy animal teams visit in a variety of settings with many different populations including with patients in recovery, people with intellectual disabilities, seniors living with Alzheimer's, veterans with PTSD, people who have experienced crisis events, those approaching end of life, as well as students in school – all with the goal of improving human health and well-being through the human-animal bond.

While many of us intuitively understand the benefits of positive interactions with animals in our lives, the body of empirical evidence supporting work with therapy animals has also become increasingly robust.

The findings from research on animal-assisted interventions in educational settings give us plenty of evidence to suggest the positive impacts of incorporating therapy animals in the classroom. Research has shown that therapy animals may help with the following aspects in learning environments:

- Foster reading abilities, such as reading rate, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.
- Enhance primary skills such as object recognition and categorization.
- Reducing stress levels, especially surrounding events like final exams.
- Provide a source of motivation, stimulation, and focus in learning.

See <https://petpartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Benefits-of-the-Human-Animal-Bond-final.pdf>

Bringing animals into schools, of course, should be done thoughtfully, intentionally, and with steps to mitigate risk. Fortunately, publications such as *Standards of Practice for Animal-Assisted Interventions* (<https://books2read.com/standards>) which articulate guidelines for therapy animal and their handlers can be an excellent resource for school boards adopting policies to ensure both safe and effective interaction.

Pet Partners is excited to see the state of Maryland leading the nation in proactive legislation around therapy animals and we are happy to support SB 409. I'm available to answer any questions you may have.

**Mary Margaret Callahan**

Pet Partners, Chief Mission Officer

[marymargaretc@petpartners.org](mailto:marymargaretc@petpartners.org)

**2021 MSPA SB 409 Senate Side.pdf**

Uploaded by: Faulkner, Rachael

Position: FAV



Delegate Paul G. Pinsky, Chair  
Delegate Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Bill: Senate Bill 409 – Education - Disruption of School Activities - Repeal of Prohibition**

**Position: Support**

Dear Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA), a professional organization representing about 500 school psychologists in Maryland. We advocate for the social-emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing of students and families across the state.

This letter is to provide support to Senate Bill 409, which would require local Boards of Education to create policies that allow the use of registered and insured therapy dogs in public schools. As you all are aware, our students are experiencing ever-increasing social/emotional and behavioral needs. Our mental health providers should be using all the tools available to them in their prevention and intervention services. Research has indicated that therapy dogs can reduce stress and provide a better sense of connection when students experience difficulties. Using therapy dogs during “animal-assisted therapy” can be especially useful as an aide to students’ social, cognitive, and emotional functioning. These therapy dogs help to strengthen the connection between the student and the provider, which is vital in any effective program. There are also “animal-assisted activities,” which are designed to operate outside of specific psychological interventions as a way to improve both emotional and physical health of students.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 409. If we can provide any additional information or be of any assistance, please contact us at [legislative@mSPAonline.org](mailto:legislative@mSPAonline.org), or Rachael Faulkner at [rfaulkner@policypartners.net](mailto:rfaulkner@policypartners.net) or (410) 693-4000.

Respectfully submitted,

Kyle Potter, Ph.D., NCSP  
Chair, Legislative Committee  
Maryland School Psychologists' Association

**Maryland State Therapy Dog Senate Bill New York**

Uploaded by: George-Michalson, Nancy

Position: FAV



**Comfort Support Smiles**

**Senator Ben Kramer Maryland State Therapy Dog Senate Bill**

Oral Testimony Thursday, February 11, 2021

My name is Nancy George-Michalson, Executive Director of New York Therapy Animals, a New York City 501(c)3 charity organization and an affiliate of Intermountain Therapy Animals. We are the official NYC Reading Education Assistance Dogs® (R.E.A.D.®) children's literacy support program with partnerships with the NYC Department of Education (DOE), private and charter schools, the New York Public Library, the Queens Library and Brooklyn READ718.

New York Therapy Animals educates both ends of the leash (human partner and their dog) in required handler workshops, therapy dog training classes and in continuing education courses. Our criteria for dogs are well-mannered, social and predictable and will inspire confidence in their interactions with people, and above all the dog must enjoy this job. The dog may never have shown aggression towards people or other animals. Our teaching methods promote healthy relationships through humane education and training and the dog has been thoroughly examined by a veterinarian for health, safety and appropriate temperament and behavior. The handler, the human end of the leash, is a proactive advocate for their dog demonstrating a solid, loving relationship. They are a team working closely together to help support students in school environments.

New York Therapy Animals has partnered with 62 schools for volunteer therapy dog team visits with children ranging from pre-K to high school seniors. Through our hands-on training classes and education curriculum, handlers and their dogs develop the tools needed to become a trained, registered and insured therapy dog team. Once passing the evaluation requirements, qualified teams can then begin their journey of volunteering and engage in specific student needs requested from social workers, psychologists, teachers, guidance counselors, speech and occupational therapists and for exposure-based interventions. These interactions in a school setting can be a catalyst to social connection and conversation helping the student to open up and feel more at ease. It is a time for the student to experience touch, to give and receive affection to and from the dog. It can also be a learning exercise to divert attention away from internal anxieties and to enjoy nonjudgmental visits with the goal of improving self-confidence and self-awareness, building courage and creating a positive experience by sharing thoughts and questions.

Special needs students with a variety of challenges and diverse disabilities benefit from these interactions encouraging shared activities and enhancing social and emotional skills designed for suitable behaviors and allowing students to connect with a calm and gentle dog in a safe way, respectful of boundaries. Our teams participate with students with dog phobias, depression, reading and language challenges for struggling and ESL students through the R.E.A.D. program, with the direction of the school representative for the particular students' needs.

We also coordinate meet and greet wellness visits in schools for students during stressful and demanding exam times that offer a take a break moment for relaxation and refocusing.

There are many sound benefits of interacting with a therapy dog: Blood pressure and heart rate decreases, breathing slows, there is an overall significant measurable feeling of relaxation, lowering stress and anxiety levels, and the release of Oxytocin, the natural miracle feel good drug for bonding.

And it's fun! A dog walks into the room and it changes the entire atmosphere. Faces light up, shoulders relax, deep breaths are taken, and big smiles appear. Students often wake up in the morning and are motivated to get out of bed knowing that the therapy dog team will be coming to the school that day.

Faculty, staff and students depend on us. They trust New York Therapy Animals education and training platform and they know that our teams are well-prepared, kind and compassionate for the many placement opportunities to be of assistance to student's needs and goals with this extra attention, guidance and support.

**This sums it up from students:**

*"I think that the program is helpful because you can practice reading and if you mess up a word you don't get embarrassed."* **Churchill School and Center**

***PS94 The Spectrum School***

*"It's so exciting to have WLLY (Willy) visit my school! I calm down so that I can use my energy with WLLY."*

*"I like to say Hi to WLLY and he's very soft. He makes me feel good and I like to brush him."*

**R.E.A.D.® Reading Education Assistance Dogs® children's literacy support program**



*"I have been so happy to see my students with ADHD sit calmly for 20 minutes and focus on a book. One of my students who stutters when he gets nervous, is able to read a book with the therapy dog team without stuttering, and his face lights up every time he pronounces a difficult word correctly and gets a "high five" from the handler and the dog."* **Jane Nunez, Guidance Counselor PS155**

*"The students are absolutely thriving with the help of the R.E.A.D. literacy program! Each week students, who were once very apprehensive and uncomfortable reading aloud, eagerly select and practice a text they are going to read to the R.E.A.D. therapy dog and handler. We have noticed a HUGE increase in not only the students' reading skills but also their confidence. Families tell me that their children value their time with the R.E.A.D. therapy dog and handler so much that they don't want to EVER miss school on the days they visit."* **Kristi Evans, Reading Specialist, Stephen Gaynor School**





"My daughter looks forward to reading with Ziggy every Friday. She picks out her book to read to Ziggy, and she is excited and feels special that she gets to read to the dogs. She has never seen it as being singled out as struggling, and that is so important. Before the READ program she stopped wanting to read aloud to me at bedtime, and now she does it eagerly. I think introducing furry friends to students who struggle with reading is a brilliant idea because it builds confidence, makes the students feel special instead of challenged and it creates excitement around reading in a way that the classroom cannot. The R.E.A.D. program is wonderful, and we are so lucky to have it in our school."  
**St. Stephen of Hungary Elementary School**



**R.E.A.D. team:** "I have two kids who at the beginning assured me that they could not read-at all, yet they happily come to read to Luna and 'monitor' if Luna likes the book .One of them, a very sad little boy, is always complaining about physical pains and does not want to be in school... except when he reads to Luna! I see his demeanor before and during the session and it's totally different. Even the way he walks out of the room is different!" Fanny and Luna **PS241 STEM**

**Grimes Elementary School**



**Testimonial from a parent of a 3rd grader at PS59 New York City:** *“With regard to the R.E.A.D. program itself, the most telling remark that my son made is that Melanie and “Mia”, the therapy dog team, listen to him non-judgmentally when he reads. He actually reiterated that point to me several different times. I think his greatest hurdle in school has been getting over his fear of letting everyone down. He wants to succeed in school for himself, but it’s even more important to him to show the people that he respects, his teachers and family members, that he’s able to keep up with his peers in school. What the R.E.A.D. program has provided to him is a period during the day in which he can enjoy reading without fear of letting anyone down. I think the program has preserved his love for reading despite his challenges, which, from my perspective, is priceless.”*



**Handlers are thoughtful and patient assisting with fluency and comprehension engaging children with ease all the while being supportive of their dog.**

**Reading levels have significantly improved for students with feelings of pride and accomplishment.**

*“A.N. is a student at our school for the past two years. His first year, A.N. was reluctant to speak with others and kept to himself for most of the day. A.N.'s second year at our school provided him with a significant change. It was the year that his teacher began the R.E.A.D. program with her class. A.N.'s first session with the reading was a surprise to many of us at school. A.N. independently chose a book and began to read with ease. The non-judgmental and comfortable environment provided by the R.E.A.D. dog team gave A.N. a voice and the opportunity to practice his reading. Currently, A.N. looks forward to the R.E.A.D. team. Aside from improving his reading skills, A.N. has established friends in school as well as becoming a “big brother” to other students.” - School Psychologist*

*“Hello. My daughter had a wonderful experience reading to Mia. She is a child who has been reluctant to read aloud. She has insecurities stemming from receiving speech therapy over the years. Reading to Mia, the therapy dog, has been such a confidence booster! She so looks forward to her time with Mia. On days that she is scheduled to read to Mia, it is the first thing she announce upon waking up (“It’s Thursday, I get to read to Mia today)! One sentence best describes what reading to Mia means to my daughter. She told me, “I don’t feel nervous at all when I read to her.” This program has been invaluable to my daughter’s self-confidence. I am so grateful for her to have participated in the READ program. It truly makes a difference.”*

**Mary H. parent of child at Beekman International School**

## PS94 The Spectrum School

Our teams work with students on the autism spectrum, sensory impaired with significant cognitive delays, severely emotionally challenged, and/or multiply disabled.



*"The R.E.A.D. therapy dog benefitted these students tremendously! They touched tackled the nervous aspect of reading to a group and the freedom of being judged. The dog calmed and soothed students with aggressive behaviors and supported them with a friendly atmosphere."*

**PS94 Special Education  
Teacher**

**PS38 Roberto Clemente  
Learning Center**



**Pathways Children's School** is for students with various neurophysiological disorders, multiple disabilities, traumatic brain injury and orthopedic disorders. Our teams are helping with sensory stimulation.





## New York School for the Deaf

The therapy dog is learning sign language to assist with the student's needs.





### **Kennedy Child Study Center**

Students with developmental delays interact with therapy dogs to acquire trust building techniques through humane education such as on how to approach a dog and learning respect and boundaries.



## Manhattan Star Academy

The School Occupational Therapist created an Animal-Assisted Therapy program curriculum for these students with social/emotional, communication and language challenges, children on the autism spectrum (to many varying degrees--some higher functioning, some lower functioning and non-verbal), cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, different genetic disorders, and overall global developmental delays. The children who have been participating in AAT are on the autism spectrum and have difficulty engaging, interacting, and connecting with others as well as significant difficulty with self-regulation.



New York Therapy Animals also partners with the NYC Office of the Mayor for the Family Justice Centers engaging with families in distress and life style changes. Hospitals, nursing home and assisted living facilities, shelters, supportive tenant residences and universities benefit from our therapy dog team visits.

## Lighthouse Guild Harriet & Robert Heilbrunn School for the Blind

Therapeutic services to children who are blind or visually impaired and have other disabilities allowing for students to interact with a calm and gentle dog and to have the tactile experience of feeling their fur.







## High School Wellness Visits

Exam time is demanding and stressful for students and we offer therapy dog wellness visits to help calm their nerves during exam times.



## National Humane Education Presentation

### PS32 Brooklyn

We value the opportunity to speak with students about humane education and the intrinsic benefits and rewards of volunteering and



**A hug from a therapy dog is  
worth a thousand words and  
fills hearts with joy.**



# **New York Therapy Animals School Testimonials NYC.**

Uploaded by: George-Michalson, Nancy

Position: FAV



February 5, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

As the Executive Director of Kennedy Children's Center, an NYCDOE-contracted preschool program for children with developmental disabilities with locations in New York City's East Harlem and The Bronx, I have witnessed the developmental skill-building opportunities, renewed focus and engagement, and innumerable smiles and laughter made possible by the kind and compassionate volunteer therapy animals and handlers of New York Therapy Animals.

It is always a joy to see how our preschoolers' faces light up when they meet these kind and gentle companions. The rich and unique developmental skill-building opportunities that interacting with these animals provides truly cannot be mimicked or replaced. As educators of preschoolers with developmental disabilities, our partnership with New York Therapy Animals has only further assured us that these special animals can make a world of difference in a child's physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development.

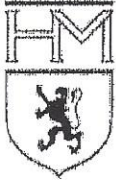
During these visits, students learn how to safely approach and interact with the animals, and practice their speech, language, and conversational skills by asking and answering questions about their new furry friends. Activities like clipping and unclipping the dog's leash and collar and taking turns brushing the animal's fur help students practice their grip and other fine motor skills. Gross motor skills come into play in a fun and engaging way when students take turns "walking" the dog with the help of their teacher and the animal's handler. These activities also help students learn to give and follow commands, thereby increasing their confidence and aiding in social skill-building and emotional well-being.

Interacting with the dogs helps students learn how to recognize feelings through body language, while simultaneously teaching them the importance of treating living creatures with care and compassion. Dogs like Mumford, Bernie, and Bobby have brought joy to countless students throughout their therapy sessions, and their presence keeps children active and engaged in their learning and development. Allowing therapy animals into our special education program has provided a unique opportunity for students to access the comfort and emotional enrichment that interacting with a trained therapy animal provides, all while making progress towards key developmental milestones.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the educational benefits of programs like Nancy George-Michalson's New York Therapy Animals.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeanne Alter".

Jeanne Alter  
Executive Director



# HORACE MANN SCHOOL

231 WEST 246<sup>TH</sup> STREET • BRONX, N.Y. 10471

(718) 432-4000

February 5, 2021

To Whom it May Concern:

We were happy to learn that Nancy George-Michalson, the Executive Director of New York Therapy Animals, has been offered the opportunity to testify before the House of Representatives about the importance of having therapy dogs in NYC schools. Throughout our time working with Ms. George-Michalson, Horace Mann School has both learned and benefitted from the many services and supports that her organization provides.

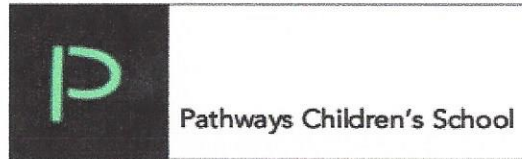
Since 2017, Ms. George-Michalson has been coming to the Upper Division (high school) of our school with her various trained volunteer therapy dog teams to participate in the school's yearly Wellness Week. Wellness Week is a combination of student and faculty run workshops featuring guest speakers and visitors, with the goal of addressing all issues surrounding physical, social, and emotional health. It is no small understatement to say that the visit of NY Therapy dogs has been a much enjoyed and highly anticipated part of our Wellness Week program. In fact, it is among the offerings that has regularly generated the most interest among our students. Prior to Covid-19, the dog visit consisted of about three to four therapy dog teams set up in a large room with students having the opportunity to go around to each team, one at a time, to meet and greet the dogs. Ms. George-Michalson's knowledgeable guidance in how to structure the visits for maximum benefit proved to be professional and skilled each year, resulting in a highly enjoyable visit to our students. Just as importantly, she provided education to our students about the benefits of therapy animals across multiple settings.

We wish the best for Ms. Michalson's New York Therapy Animals organization and hope others have the opportunity to share in the positive merits of interactions with therapy dogs.

Sincerely,

Ian Pervil, Ph.D.  
Psychologist, Upper Division

Christine Uhrowczik, M.S.  
Administrative Assistant, Upper Division



[www.pathwayschildrenschool.org](http://www.pathwayschildrenschool.org)  
1445 Madison Ave, Ground Fl, New York, NY 10029  
Phone Number: 9172620120

August 9, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

We have been in partnership with New York Therapy Animals since 2016 and have continued to benefit from their excellent therapy dog teams. We are a special education program for non-verbal and non-ambulatory, medically complex students and have seen tremendous emotional and physical progress with our students due to the presence of therapy teams that come and embed themselves in our community.

Our most recent experience with the organization is with the team Melinda and Woody. They had left such a positive impression on our students that they wrote letters to the team specifically letting them know how much they will miss them for the rest of the Summer, what they had learned by having them around and spending literacy time with them, and hope that they come back to visit in the Fall. The level of professionalism is consistent, and the teams are knowledgeable, sensitive to the student and staff needs, and above all the empathy to share their time tirelessly to wait for student responses and appreciate what other therapy teams miss with students of our population.

We intend to continue our partnership with the organization as they are, based on our experience, one of the best therapy dog team organizations we have worked with. I would be happy to discuss in detail how our program has grown with the help of New York Therapy Animals at your convenience.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Dechantal Montano, OTR/L  
Program Director  
Pathways Children's School  
Email: [dmontano@pathwayschildrenschool.org](mailto:dmontano@pathwayschildrenschool.org)

Dr. G. Taylor  
*Principal*  
Mr. G. Ross  
**Assistant Principal**



315 East 113<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10029

**Phone:** (212) 860-5834

**Fax:** (212) 860-6076

**Web:** [www.ps102m.org](http://www.ps102m.org)

***EXPLORE THROUGH LEARNING!***

---

Dear Ms. George-Michalson,

February 3, 2021

The New York Therapy Animals and the Reading Education Assistance Dogs® therapy program has been extraordinarily effective by encouraging and inspiring students to read and develop social emotional health at Jacques Cartier (P.S. 102, in Manhattan).

Even in this difficult time of Covid when the children are working remotely they still share about positive comforting feelings that they still carry with them from their experiences with our therapy dog. This has been especially helpful throughout this difficult time. The children also share about how much they are looking forward to returning to the school building and interacting with the therapy dog once again, It brings them much comfort and joy.

The therapy animal program encourages children to practice reading so that they can meet with the therapy dog and read. The program is also an incentive for developing social emotional skills and staying on task between sessions.

Our experience with the therapy animal program is that it has a very positive impact with the children not only academically and I feel it's really important to continue with the program and hopefully be able to expand it to other schools some more children can benefit.

Sincerely,

Patricia Foley, Social Worker P.S. 102



**Maryland statement 2.21.pdf**

Uploaded by: Klotz, Kathy

Position: FAV



INTERMOUNTAIN THERAPY ANIMALS

PETS HELPING PEOPLE



READING EDUCATION  
ASSISTANCE DOGS®

Since 1999

A PROGRAM OF  
INTERMOUNTAIN THERAPY ANIMALS

## Statement in Support of Permitting Therapy Animals in Maryland Schools

February 10, 2021

Good Afternoon,

My name is Kathy Klotz, and I am the executive director of Intermountain Therapy Animals (ITA) in Salt Lake City, Utah. ITA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1993, providing animal-assisted interactions in a wide range of settings. **Our mission is to enhance quality of life through the power of the human/animal bond.** We have more than 300 teams—meaning a therapy animal and its handler—who have been screened, trained, tested and insured to be healthy, safe and appropriately skilled.

These ITA volunteer teams have been serving their communities for more than 27 years at no cost to any client or facility, visiting those who are physically or developmentally disabled, emotionally or psychologically impaired, lonely or suffering from depression, in more than 100 facilities ranging from hospitals, counseling centers, nursing, extended care and memory care centers, detention homes, schools and libraries in Utah, Montana and Idaho.

Our methods and practices have proven so successful that we now also have 21 other colleague organizations throughout the U.S. who use our standards and materials for training and testing protocols.

We have been invited to speak to you today about the value of therapy dogs being present in schools, so of first importance is to **differentiate therapy animals from service animals.**

While service animals are highly trained to support one person, therapy animals support a wide spectrum of other people. Simply put, service animals have a full-time career and therapy animals volunteer part-time. That does not mean, however, that being a therapy animal is a simple or casual undertaking. Many people consider volunteering as a therapy team for animal-assisted interactions to be more like a para-profession than a typical volunteer role, requiring extensive training and a solid relationship between animal and handler. The foundation for their success is an animal who has the right temperament, enabling them to light up at each new stranger they encounter, day after week after month. Without such a temperament, connection will not occur and change cannot happen. It's an individual thing, not suited for most dogs—or just any pet—but all breeds *can* qualify if they have that temperament coupled with the crucial training for skills and behavior.

The first concern of teachers, parents and school personnel at all levels is of course the safety and well-being of their students, and that's why therapy animals are rigorously trained, tested, licensed and insured for liability, and why your bill includes detailed criteria for who might qualify.

When all those precautions are in place, therapy animals become **catalysts and motivators.** They offer love, hope, comfort, joy, normalcy—and fun, when all those qualities are in short supply.

Research has established that animals can have a significant positive impact for people with a whole range of diagnoses and situations, and can further therapeutic goals that include:

- Empathy • Physical contact
- Outward focus
- Nurturing • Mental and sensory stimulation
- Rapport
- Acceptance of self and situation
- Patient compliance • Socialization
- Physiological improvements, including lower blood pressure, slower breathing, greater calm and relaxation.

In our case, since you are considering the benefits of having therapy animals in schools, we have been asked specifically to tell you about what we have witnessed through our signature program, called **Reading Education Assistance Dogs®—the R.E.A.D.® Program**—which we launched in 1999. It was the original literacy support program in which children read to therapy dogs, and it has now been emulated by other therapy organizations, but R.E.A.D. was the first and foremost. We have trained and registered more than 6,500 teams throughout the U.S. and in 26 other countries around the world. To teach and help implement this program, we have traveled as far as Japan and Taiwan on one side of our planet and Sweden, England, Spain and Portugal on the other.

These licensed teams work to help children not only improve their basic skills like fluency and comprehension, but also to inspire them to fall in love with reading and books, and the presence of a R.E.A.D. dog can truly change their lives forever. We focus primarily on children aged 4 to 8, when it's crucial for them to **learn to read** so that they can **read to learn** forever after, although we have partnered with many other demographics, as Nancy George-Michalson will tell you.

In our more than 20 years with this program, I have accumulated literally cabinets full of testimonials and enthusiastic feedback from parents, educators and children themselves. Among the many commendations and recognitions the program has received are a Points of Light award from President George H.W. Bush, a commendation from the United States Senate, a partnership with PBS Television, and a TED talk.

But more important to us than quantitative numbers or awards is the effect this program has on each and every child, one by one, session by session. And we know that for children reading with a dog:

- Their relaxation increases and stress and blood pressure decrease (Fear and/or stress, especially chronic stress, make it literally impossible for a brain to engage in learning)
- They are highly motivated to participate and stay happily engaged
- They are freed from judgment and/or intimidation—real or perceived—from their peers, constantly citing how important it is to them that dogs do not judge, laugh or criticize when they make mistakes
- Their confidence, self-esteem—and *even attendance*—increase and blossom in this relationship with some great listeners who really care about them
- And, their reading levels increase accordingly—many students experience increases of 2 to 4 grade levels within one school year.

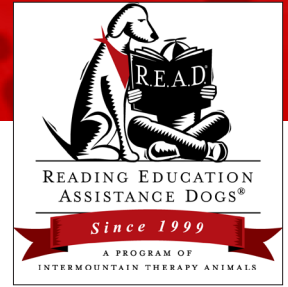
An episode of the NOVA series (on PBS) called “The School of the Future” (aired in September of 2016) made the urgent point that we need to emphasize helping children **be capable of learning** rather than **what to learn**, because the world is changing so rapidly that we don't know what they will

be needing to learn even in the near future. It went on to highlight all that research now knows about **brain development and what children need to be able to learn**. Reading with dogs satisfies every one of the important building blocks that need to be in place to support brain development and help children be able to learn. (*Please see attached paper.*)

I will add a personal note here, that I started as a volunteer with my own dog, an Australian Shepherd, about two months after Intermountain Therapy Animals was launched in 1993, and we worked as a team for 8 years, primarily with children in residential care and with our R.E.A.D. program from the outset. And I have been executive director since 1997, so I have been living with and experiencing these benefits with thousands of encounters for 27+ years myself, and I will state unequivocally that putting people together with animals, for the mutual healing benefits of both, has been rewarding beyond words.

Therapy dogs at school are a powerful adjunct for your teachers and counselors and will enhance the whole spectrum of academic, social and emotional development. Dogs will change the entire atmosphere in your schools, and we urge you to give your Maryland school children the opportunity to reap the many benefits they offer.

Thank you!



# 21 Years – 26 Countries

These are all the countries and regions, in addition to the United States, where R.E.A.D. is currently flourishing:



Austria



Dominican Republic



Luxembourg



South Africa



Belgium



Finland



Mexico



Spain



Bosnia-Herzegovina



France



The Netherlands



Sweden



Canada



Germany



Norway



The United Kingdom



Chile



Iceland



Portugal



Wales



Colombia



Italy



Republic of China/Taiwan



Croatia



Kazakhstan



Slovenia



There are as many different ways to enjoy reading together as there are R.E.A.D.® dogs and kids.



**“Mom! Today I had the BEST day of my life...EVER! I got to read to a dog! It’s the best thing I’ve ever done in school!”**







# Selected Quotes

## From a Librarian:

As supervisor of Youth Services at Twin Falls Public Library, I am always looking for creative ways to bring children and books together. I am very aware of the need of beginning readers to find someone who will listen in a non-threatening manner to them as they struggle to learn to read. Therefore, when I heard about the work of Intermountain Therapy Animals, I was intrigued but had some concerns about bringing dogs into the library. Would the dogs be overwhelmed by the excitement of the young participants? I also worried about allergic reactions. But ITA allayed all my concerns and I was soon sold on their professionalism, their dedication and their enthusiasm. Our program has been a HUGE success. The R.E.A.D. program is a wonderful service to this community!

- Annie-Laurie Burton  
Youth Services Supervisor  
Twin Falls (Idaho) Library

## From Teachers:

Dear Mrs. Johnson & Alexis (the R.E.A.D. team),

You have no idea just how much you have encouraged my students this year. I have been teaching first grade for 15 years and never have I seen the majority of my students develop such a strong love for reading as I have this year.

Every Tuesday the students shout for joy because they know that you and Alexis will be here. They know that they can read and no one will laugh or lose interest in them no matter how long it takes them to read their book. Your kind words of encouragement mean so much as they attempt to decode each word. You and Alexis are wonderful!

Our test results were amazing! Eight of my students were reading above grade level! Your program has been so helpful. Thank you so much for all you do and for making this a great year for my kids. May you, your family and Alexis be blessed.

Love ~ Lisa Perrault

Hi Allie,

I just wanted to send a thank you to you and Piper for your work with our students. At the high school level, many of our students with disabilities have gotten to a point in which they have given up on reading. Many find reading laborious and boring and therefore choose not to engage in any reading, which only increases their skills gap. Having a therapy dog to read to has sparked a new-found interest in reading that has not been there in years. Piper has made many of our students excited to read, which is no easy feat! They have a new-found confidence and seem at ease with the idea of reading to a therapy dog versus to an adult or their peers. Thank you for your commitment to our school and for helping support our work with our kids. The students and I truly enjoy working with you and Piper!

- Jill Rausch  
Whitewater High School  
Special Education Teacher  
Freshman Class Advisor

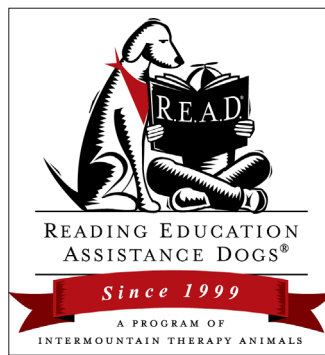
## From Parents:

I just want to tell you what a wonderful program this has been for my daughter Hanna. She has shown more interest in reading since reading with the dogs. She loves animals, and this is one program that she has talked about throughout the year. How wonderful and lucky we are to have this available in our schools.

- Terri Vaflades

When my son started reading to Buddy ... I began to notice how excited he was about reading, how he talked about it, and about the dog, all the time, and how the excitement and interest in reading carried over, even when the dog wasn't there.

- Keegan's dad, Twin Falls, Idaho



## The Reading Education Assistance Dogs® (R.E.A.D.®) Program Meets the “School of the Future”

**I**ntermountain Therapy Animals launched R.E.A.D. in 1999 at the Salt Lake City Library, designing it to be an innovative and exciting opportunity to engage struggling young readers through the help of therapy dogs. We already knew that therapy animals were effective in medical settings—providing motivation, healthy physiological benefits, distraction and happiness—and we were convinced the same benefits would apply to children who were anxious about reading.

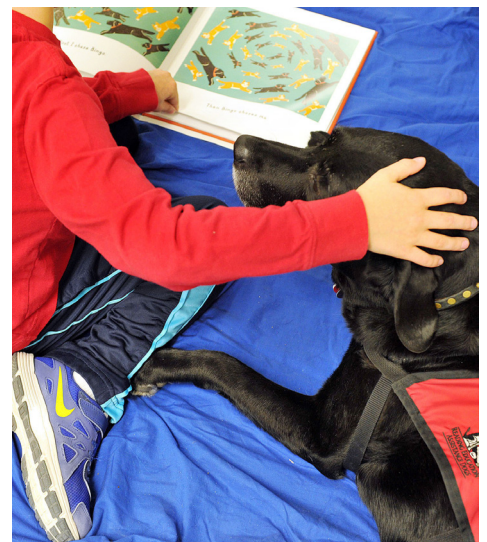
R.E.A.D. is the original literacy program in which children read to therapy animals, and still the most respected and endorsed by educators, librarians, parents, and kids everywhere. After more than 20 years, the program continues to grow while it fosters a love of books and reading for children who participate. As of November 2019, there are now over 6,500 registered R.E.A.D. teams (tested, insured therapy animals and their human owner/handlers) licensed for the practice of R.E.A.D., with active programs in all 50 of the United States and 26 other countries.

### *How It Works*

Key to the R.E.A.D. program is that our teams establish a warm, supportive, trusted relationship with individual children, who always blossom in such an atmosphere—dog or not. But the attraction of children to dogs is so powerful that, as in other venues where animals participate in therapies, the “client” is extremely motivated to participate. They clamor to be part of the program; they feel accepted and supported, not judged or criticized or threatened.

In the R.E.A.D. program, each child reads aloud to a therapy dog. A skilled handler offers support and help as needed, and animated discussions ensue, about the books, the ideas, the words, and of course the dogs. As goals are accomplished, children get to choose a brand new book that is age- and reading-level appropriate and have it “pawtographed” by their R.E.A.D. dog. Thus, new (and highly valued) books are sent into the homes of the children.

Real change for children comes through high-quality, individualized learning opportunities, dependable trusted relationships, and one-on-one interest and attention. Typical reading intervention programs in schools and libraries do not address the root causes of why children struggle to read. School budgets are tight throughout the nation and there is little funding for reading support programs.



Many teachers are overwhelmed with what they need to accomplish in the classroom, as are parents at the end of the day, and many do not have or make the time to read with their children. It is all humiliating, demeaning, and ineffective—the percentage of children unable to read at grade level by fourth grade has been stubbornly resisting change in the United States over the past 40 years (see reports by the Annie E. Casey Foundation), *still hovering at almost 70%*. Thus, the R.E.A.D. program focuses primarily on children K-3, when it is crucial that they *learn to read* so they will be able to *read to learn* forever more.

### ***What Educators Have Learned***

A recent book provides more insight: in *The Smartest Kids in the World, and How They Got That Way*, journalist/author Amanda Ripley traveled the world to study and compare educational systems. One factor that surfaces consistently is the importance of meaningful relationships, whether with teachers or family. Some have gone so far as to beg parents—even those willing and eager to help—not to volunteer in the usual ways in the classroom, but rather to spend any available time reading at home with their children.



Further, in a recent (September 2016) PBS Nova episode called “School of the Future,” educators spoke passionately about all they have learned about the brain and its development. We are living in unparalleled times of change, both technologically and socially, and we need to know how to teach kids to be able to adapt so they can succeed in education and in life. At an ever-increasing pace, today’s young kids are going to be dealing with technologies that haven’t even been invented yet, so adaptability is key.

Our R.E.A.D. theories and practices are affirmed as we have seen how powerfully R.E.A.D. responds to the very latest in what scientists know about young children and learning. Some salient points:

- **Reading interventions impact a child’s developing brain, and early reading interventions produce great brain growth.**

Reading is not a skill that the brain is wired to do. A child must learn to orchestrate functions designed for other purposes, and two parts of the brain are essential. Research suggests that the development of these two areas of the brain—that influence language production and language comprehension—depends a lot on a child’s environment.

Children need to hear language—not from TV but from people—and have books in their home. Growing up in a less advantaged household may slow development of brain areas critical to language and reading. The lower the socio-economic status, the greater the risk. (One sobering study notes that children in the highest socio-economic level households have an average of 14 books each, whereas in the lowest socio-economic households, the average is *one book per 300 children*.) Early reading interventions change the physical structure of children’s brains, showing marked improvement in several reading skills and, most striking, the greatest gains in the size of these crucial brain areas.



***The R.E.A.D. program not only provides the practice with all reading and communication skills, but also sends new books home with children.***

- **Chronic stress hampers development in areas where learning and processing emotions intersect. Feeling safe and nurtured opens up whole new brain pathways. Children need a safe place and a positive environment.**

With chronic stress, the body is flooded constantly with cortisol, which disrupts the brain in several ways. Whether due to family life or neighborhood, kids in high-risk environments are already in defensive mode before their day even starts. They have no school supplies, they're hungry, they have no money for a class trip, and on and on. There is a prevention for this—a human buffer. When children feel safe and nurtured, that there is an adult who cares, this stress is ameliorated.

*R.E.A.D. teams absolutely provide this “buffer” (human AND canine)—beings who care, who are consistent, who are safe and trustworthy, who provide physiological calm and relaxation.*

- **Children need to collaborate, and they respond when they have someone to collaborate with.**

Effective learning requires activities both alone and together with others.

*Parents and family are the ideal goal for the “together” parts, but when they are not available, R.E.A.D. teams have proven to be a powerfully effective substitute.*

- **In many other fields, we have learned that there is no such thing as AVERAGE, and that effective learning and training needs to shift to individuals and their unique needs.**

A child's education needs to be focused around the best way for *that* child to receive learning. Our one-size-fits-all education model lets many children flounder. Individual children who think differently, who learn differently, need to get the methods that work best for them.

*A R.E.A.D. team is able to focus one by one on the particular interests, abilities and preferences of each child, with no peer pressure. In such an atmosphere, each child can blossom with both skill and confidence.*

- **Learning and emotion are intimately connected. Effective learning requires emotional engagement. Emotional connections change attitudes toward learning.**

*This is another area where the R.E.A.D. program absolutely excels. A R.E.A.D. dog provides both physiological benefits that help a child feel calm and relaxed and good from the inside out, along with the emotional attraction of a beautiful non-judgmental animal to interact with. Combining these advantages with a skilled handler to facilitate and the resulting environment is powerfully charged with positive learning possibilities.*



• **Dramatic erosion in reading skills occurs during the summer. It is a major contributor to the learning gap, because for children who get no ongoing support, it takes until the end of November for them to catch up from the “summer slide” to where they were in the spring.**

This summer slide happens most to children at the lowest socio-economic levels, and the effect is cumulative because they may never have the opportunity to catch up to their peers. But just a 5-week session of reading intervention in the summer helps a child maintain his level of skills.

*R.E.A.D. participates in many summer reading programs for this very purpose, to prevent the summer erosion, and provides a really fun and engaging way to do it.*

### Summary

All these crucial factors can be positively influenced by a R.E.A.D. team when a child is not able to get the individualized help s/he needs in other ways.

The R.E.A.D. Program has been welcomed and sought after by educators, parents and librarians throughout the country as a successful, innovative way to engage young children who are struggling to read.

ITA receives constant feedback from educators that the children who participate in the program see literacy gains of 1–4 reading levels over a school year. In addition, children learn to love reading. R.E.A.D. is now proven to make a dramatic and substantial difference for thousands of children, especially those whose families and socio-economic situations may not be able to cope.

If we agree that children are our most valuable resource, we need to make sure we can help kids of *all* backgrounds learn successfully. The opportunity to give such children a consistent relationship with a caring adult and dog has had life-changing benefits, not only for individual children but for our society as a whole.

This teacher’s observations are classic regarding the value of the R.E.A.D. program:

“The R.E.A.D. program is a huge success in our school. We are an elementary school in East Harlem. Many of the students are very poor and many have emotional or learning disabilities. R.E.A.D. has been a great motivator for children with emotional regulation issues, a strong academic influence for children with learning disabilities, and also teaches humane treatment of animals as well as social skills. The children often ask when the therapy dogs are coming and get prepared by choosing a book to read to them as well as making positive behavioral choices to be a part of the program.”

– *Patricia Foley, LCSW, PS102 Jacques Cartier School,  
New York City, NY*



**TESTIMONY for THERAPY DOG BILL-Kuhn-SB409.pdf**

Uploaded by: Kuhn, Harriet

Position: FAV

## TESTIMONY-IN SUPPORT OF SB409

Good Afternoon,

I am Harriet Lurensky Kuhn and I have been a School Psychologist for 30 years. I work in Montgomery County Public Schools. I previously came before the House of Delegates Ways and Means Committee on March 6, 2020 and again yesterday to testify about my passion for helping children and the use of therapy dog in schools. Over the years I have had success in using a therapy dog with children. Therapy dogs create magic in schools and are needed now more than ever. It is hard to find any program that matches having a kind and compassionate, trained dog in a school being there to assist children. That is why Senate Bill 409 must be passed. Please allow me to elaborate and tell you why this bill is so important to the students, staff and families of Maryland schools-especially now.

We have a wide range of students who attend Maryland schools from Head Start to high school, special education to general education students. As you all know, we are currently experiencing a once in a lifetime pandemic where children have been out of school buildings for a year and have been engaged in virtual learning. Once it is safe to return, children will need a wide range of mental health services. I want to convey to the committee that therapy dogs provide emotional and social support for students. Data driven research shows these specially trained dogs improve well-being and mental health. Children exposed to dogs, are naturally able to learn about kindness, empathy and self-control. When there is a friendly dog in a school environment, staff and students thrive. We will need as many student supports as are available to assist in meeting the needs of all students when we can safely go back into the school buildings.

Therapy Dog programs rely on volunteers so this is a no cost way to provide mental health services to children in school. As I stated back in March of 2020 before this committee, when therapy dogs are allowed in schools, students benefit. They make improvements in the areas of social/emotional functioning, gross motor skills, as well as reading and language skills. Research and first-hand knowledge tells us that dogs build confidence and allow kids to grow and develop in order to reach their maximum potential. Dogs in schools provide comfort and an unparalleled sense of normalcy for students which is an area of great need right now.

Kozy Girl loves everyone. She is my therapy dog who currently works in two Montgomery County Public Schools with me. She has been tested, is registered as an American Kennel Club Therapy Dog, an Alliance of Therapy Dog and a Canine Good Citizen. Kozy Girl always works to assist as needed in school. Students who experience suicidal thoughts, anger, depression or anxiety have found that a visit with Kozy Girl has helped them calm down, refocus and go back to class, which is preferable to having an administrator phone a parent. All Maryland students should have access to working with a therapy dog in their school if it will benefit them. Thank you for your support.

Harriet Lurensky Kuhn, M.A., M.Ed., NCSP, LPC  
School Psychologist  
Montgomery County Public Schools  
Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement-Psychological Services

# **SB409 Center for Hope school dogs SWA.pdf**

Uploaded by: Lombardi, Joyce

Position: FAV



SB409 - County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs - Policy for Handling and Use in Schools  
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee– February 11, 2021  
Testimony of Joyce Lombardi, Director of Government Relations  
Position: **SUPPORT SPONSOR AMENDMENTS**

---

Center for Hope (CFH) writes in support of SB409, which would require county boards of education to allow the use of “therapy” dogs in public schools. It is our understanding that the sponsor is amending the bill to include the use of “facility” dogs as well. Center for Hope supports those amendments.



Center for Hope, a subsidiary of LifeBridge Health, helps clients and patients heal from acute violence such as child abuse, domestic violence, street violence and elder abuse through integrated, evidence-based programs that extend beyond hospital walls. We provide trauma-informed crisis intervention, forensic interviews, medical exams, mental health, wraparound case management, family advocacy and workforce development services.

**FACILITY AND THERAPY DOGS.** “Therapy dogs” and “facility dogs” are terms of art across the nation, and have different standards of training, use and certification. Generally, “facility dogs” (like Manny, above) are specially trained dogs that are appropriate for all people and encounters in institutional settings such as schools and children’s advocacy centers. Generally, therapy dogs are trained to provide emotional support to one specific person. Generally, facility dogs have more training. Both types of dogs are recognized under Maryland law. Passed in 2019, the court dog program guides Maryland courts on standards for “facility” and “therapy” dogs and handlers who support court proceedings with child witnesses. Those definitions are the result of input by many Maryland stakeholders and are enshrined in Md Code, Cts and Judicial Proceedings Art. §9-501.

Center for Hope’s children’s advocacy center features a highly trained service dog named **Manny**, pictured above, a Zenlike black lab who been who has been calming presence to numerous children and families engaging in the investigative process after disclosing, experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Children and adults adore him. Manny is a carefully selected, well tended and highly trained “facility dog,” who went through over two years of training at Canine Companions for Independence, a national organization that trains service dogs for adults, children, and veterans, and trains facility dogs (like Manny) to work with professionals in a visitation, education or healthcare setting. Just over half of the dogs graduate from Canine Companions- most lack the temperament to be Manny. CCI is certified by Assistance Dogs International, which sets benchmarks to measure excellence in the assistance dog industry. Dogs like Manny – and their handlers – must pass specific tests and must conduct themselves with utmost safety, consistency and professionalism in a variety of public and private settings.



Thus Center for Hope supports the proposed sponsor amendments that would, for example, allow the “USE OF **FACILITY OR THERAPY DOGS**” in all places in the bill where ‘therapy dogs’ are mentioned, and also use the **MEANINGS IN CTS AND JUD. PROC. ART. §9-501, which define both terms therapy and facility dog for use in court proceedings.**

Having witnessed the powerful soothing effect Manny has on children and adults, Center for Hope believes this same comfort should be provided to students who welcome dogs (and who are not afraid or allergic), under the same guidelines governing their use in Maryland courts.

Joyce Lombardi, Director of Government Relations  
Center for Hope, 2300 North Charles Street, Baltimore MD 21218  
410-429-7050

*LifeBridge Health is a regional health system comprising Sinai Hospital of Baltimore, Levindale Geriatric Center and Hospital in Baltimore; Northwest Hospital; Carroll Hospital and Grace Medical Center (formerly Bon Secours). At LifeBridge Health and Center for Hope, we are committed to convening national best practice and trauma experts to respond to violence, abuse and exploitation of our area’s most vulnerable populations.*

**SB 409 therapy dogs PSSAM oppose.pdf**

Uploaded by: Fannon, Mary Pat

Position: UNF



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

---

**BILL:** SB 409  
**TITLE:** County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs - Policy for Handling and Use in Schools  
**DATE:** February 11, 2021  
**POSITION:** Oppose  
**COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
**CONTACT:** Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

---

This bill would require each board of education to allow the use of therapy dogs in public schools; it would require each therapy dog be accompanied by a handler; and require each board to adopt a policy for the use and handling of therapy dogs in public schools.

The Public Schools Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), representing all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes SB 409**.

Several school systems have allowed therapy dogs (or animals) in school buildings, but in isolated circumstances that are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. For example, after the 2018 school shootings in St. Mary's County, therapy dogs were brought in and served as a useful therapeutic intervention for some students. The law regarding service animals is clear in federal and state law, however, there is no parallel statute to draw from regarding therapy animals, outside of fair housing and national travel advisories. We appreciate the sponsor's good intentions to expand any supportive therapy or environment for children, but the decision to develop a policy and program of this type should be determined by local boards of education and local superintendents.

Therefore, PSSAM **opposes SB 409** and requests an **unfavorable** committee report.

*One Voice, One Vision for Maryland's Students*

P. O. Box 12040, Baltimore, MD 21281

[www.pssam.org](http://www.pssam.org); [marypat.fannon@pssam.org](mailto:marypat.fannon@pssam.org); 410-935-7281

**AACPS SB409 Therapy Dogs OPP 2.11.21.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ortiz, Jeanette

Position: UNF



**SB409 COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION - THERAPY DOGS - POLICY FOR HANDLING AND USE  
IN SCHOOLS**

February 11, 2021

EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

**OPPOSE**

Jeanette Ortiz, Esq., Legislative & Policy Counsel (410.703.5352)

---

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **SB409 County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs - Policy for Handling and Use in Schools**. This bill requires each local board of education to allow, and adopt a policy for, the use of therapy dogs in public schools. Under the bill, a “therapy dog” is a dog that is certified to provide affection and comfort to children who need emotional support in a school setting.

AACPS complies with both State and federal law in providing for the use of service animals to individuals with disabilities. Therapy and emotional support dogs are not covered under the scope of these laws. Emotional support animals, comfort animals, and therapy dogs are not service animals under Title II and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Accordingly, this bill would expand the scope and complexity of student supports that a school would be required to manage without requiring a documented need for this support. While this legislation defines “therapy dog” as a dog that is “certified” to provide affection and comfort to children who need emotional support in a school setting, there currently is not a legally recognized “certification” for this purpose. As such, this legislation would leave open to interpretation what dogs could serve as therapy dogs. The bill also creates the risk of having disruptive dogs that are not trained causing a disturbance at schools and potential harm to students, teachers, and staff. Having such a dog in schools could have the unintended consequences of creating additional issues for children who are already in need of emotional support.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on SB409.

# **SB 409. Therapy Dogs and Handlers in Schools.pdf**

Uploaded by: Woolums, John

Position: UNF

**BILL:** Senate Bill 409  
**TITLE:** County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs – Policy for Handling and Use in Schools  
**DATE:** February 11, 2021  
**POSITION:** OPPOSE  
**STATUS:** Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's boards of education, opposes Senate Bill 409, because it would unreasonably mandate the accommodation of "therapy dogs" in schools in a manner that is not consistent with federal or state laws governing service animals, which are already clearly permitted. In addition, this bill would unreasonably mandate the presence of a handler to accompany each student and therapy dog.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal statute, amended most recently in 2008, that prohibits discrimination on the basis of an individual's disability, and Title II of the Act makes it applicable to public schools (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.). In the education setting, the ADA requires the provision of reasonable accommodations for disabled students such as building new facilities in an accessible fashion, altering existing facilities to provide accessibility, redesigning educational equipment for use by the disabled, providing needed aides, and providing tests and other written materials in alternative formats.

Under the ADA, a service animal is defined as a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The tasks performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability. The dog must be trained to take a specific action when needed to assist the person with a disability. For example, a person with diabetes may have a dog that is trained to alert them when their blood sugar reaches high or low levels. A person with depression may have a dog that is trained to remind them to take their medication. Or, a person who has epilepsy may have a dog that is trained to detect the onset of a seizure and then help the person remain safe during the seizure.

Students with service animals may bring their service animals with them to school as an accommodation. Under the Individuals with Disabilities and Parents of Minors with Disabilities Service Animals (Md. Code Ann., Hum. Serv. 7-702, 7-704, 7-705) the definition of service animals is enhanced to include animals which perform any of the following tasks: guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing to an intruder or sounds, providing minimal protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, fetching dropped items, or detecting the onset of a seizure. The purpose of this law is to broaden the rights of individuals who use service animals. A person who violates this law is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine up to \$500.00 for each offense.

The federal government has also weighed in on the topic of service animals. The United States Department of Justice published Final Rules governing the use of service animals in schools (28 C.F.R. Part 35 (Sept. 15, 2010)). A service animal under the Final Rules is a dog that is housebroken and has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability.

However, the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship is not considered work or tasks under the federal regulations governing service animals. MABE opposes the expansion of the provisions of state and federal law currently applicable to service animals to require schools to adopt policies in order to permit the use by students of therapy dogs.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 409.