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, or Rachael Faulkner at rfaulkner@policypartners.net or (410) 693-4000.

Respectfully submitted,

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

MARYLAND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' ASSOCIATION