

On behalf of the Association of Animal-Assisted Intervention Professionals (AAAIP) and Pet Partners, we respectfully submit this letter in support of HB0128 / SB0299, concerning the inclusion of therapy dogs in Maryland schools.

AAAIP is a professional membership organization that supports individuals who incorporate therapy dogs into paid vocations, including educators, school counselors, and other school-based professionals. Pet Partners is a national leader in animal-assisted interventions and has, for more than four decades, trained, registered, and insured volunteer therapy animal teams—many of whom provide services in educational settings across the country.

We strongly support the intent of SB0299 and commend the legislature for recognizing the potential benefits that appropriately implemented therapy dog programs can offer students, educators, and school communities. When thoughtfully designed and responsibly managed, therapy dog programs can contribute positively to student well-being, social-emotional learning, and school climate.

At the same time, our collective experience underscores the importance of ensuring that such programs are grounded in established evidence-based practices that prioritize student safety, animal welfare, and ethical implementation. The field of animal-assisted interventions (AAI) has developed comprehensive guidance to support these goals. In particular, we wish to respectfully note the existence of two widely recognized resources:

- **The Standards of Practice in Animal-Assisted Interventions**, developed through a multidisciplinary collaboration of professionals and available at [therapyanimalstandards.org](https://therapyanimalstandards.org); and
- **The Competencies for the Ethical Inclusion of Therapy and Facility Animals**, which outlines core knowledge and skills for professionals working with animals in human services and educational environments available at [aaaiponline.org/resources/](https://aaaiponline.org/resources/).

These resources reflect current professional consensus and are designed to be applicable across settings, including schools. We believe they may serve as helpful reference points as Maryland considers implementation details, guidance, or future rulemaking related to SB0299.

AAAIP and Pet Partners stand ready to serve as resources to legislators, school administrators, and policymakers as this important work moves forward. We share a common goal of ensuring that therapy dog programs in schools are effective, ethical, and sustainable, and that they operate in a manner that protects both students and the animals involved.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue and for the opportunity to share our perspective. We appreciate your consideration and support of responsible, evidence-informed approaches to animal-assisted interventions in Maryland schools.

Respectfully submitted,

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