



## **SB0299 – COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION – THERAPY DOGS – POLICY FOR HANDLING AND USE IN SCHOOLS**

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EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

### **OPPOSE**

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **SB0299 – County Boards of Education – Therapy Dogs – Policy for Handling and Use in Schools**. This bill requires county boards to allow the use of therapy dogs in public schools in the county. For the purpose of the bill, a therapy dog is a certified or registered dog that is trained to provide affection and comfort to children who need emotional support in school settings. Therapy dogs in public schools must be accompanied by a handler.

Additionally, county boards are required to adopt a policy for the use and handling of therapy dogs in public schools in the county. The policy is required to include: (1) local or national certification or registration requirements for therapy dogs; (2) guidelines for handlers of therapy dogs; (3) guidelines for when and where therapy dogs and handlers are allowed in school buildings; (4) notification requirements for parents, students, and school faculty and staff; (5) and guidelines for the management of students and staff with allergies to dogs or who are uncomfortable around dogs.

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 do not fall under the scope of these laws. Emotional support animals, comfort animals, and therapy dogs are not considered 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 support 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 of what dogs could serve as therapy dogs, creating 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 SB0299.