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BILL: Senate Bill 299
TITLE: County Boards of Education – Therapy Dogs – Policy for Handling and Use in Schools
HEARING DATE: February 27, 2026
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
CONTACT: Sam Mathias, Legal & Policy Director (smathias@mabe.org)

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State’s local boards of education, **respectfully opposes Senate Bill 299, County Boards of Education – Therapy Dogs – Policy for Handling and Use in Schools.**

SB 299 requires local boards of education to establish a policy for the use and handling of therapy dogs in public schools, allowing their use with requirement and policy parameters. This bill also outlines the requirements for each local board of education’s therapy dog policy, including registration, guidelines, and safety considerations.

MABE respects and understands the research of the benefits of therapy dogs in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression in humans, just to name a few. However, SB 299 requires that local school boards allow the use of therapy dogs in all public schools, usurping the power of local school boards to make decisions that are in direct response to the needs of their communities. Additionally, unlike the federal American with Disabilities Act that has a specific definition of “service dog” and significant guidance on service dogs, there is no parallel in state or federal law for therapy dogs. As a result, there has not been consistent application of what constitutes a “certified” therapy dog. Therefore, while MABE recognizes the benefits that animals can provide for students and staff, MABE supports the ability of local boards to pass and implement policies in response to the needs of their school systems, rather than as a result of a mandate from the State.

For these reasons, **MABE opposes SB 299 and respectfully requests an unfavorable report.**