

HB 128/SB 299: County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs - Policy for Handling and Use in Schools: Please vote to OPPOSE this bill at this time.

Dear Ways & Means Committee and Education, Energy & the Environment Committee:

I am writing to respectfully **oppose HB 128/SB 299 at this time.**

While I appreciate the intent behind introducing therapy dogs into schools, this bill is **premature and insufficiently defined**. As written, it lacks critical safeguards necessary to protect **student safety, parental trust, and school accountability**.

Most concerning is the absence of **clear, enforceable standards** addressing:

- **Who is authorized to utilize therapy dogs** and under what circumstances
- **How often and in what settings** therapy dogs may be used
- Whether **handlers are required to present government-issued photo identification**
- Whether **handlers must undergo background checks**, including criminal history screening, before being allowed access to students

Schools are responsible for the care and safety of children, many of whom are very young, medically vulnerable, or unable to advocate for themselves. Allowing outside individuals into school buildings—particularly those interacting directly with students—**without mandatory identification and background checks is unacceptable**.

Additionally, the bill provides insufficient guidance on **liability, training standards, animal behavior protocols, allergy accommodations, and parental consent**. These omissions place unnecessary risk on students and expose school systems to avoidable legal and safety issues.

County boards of education should not be asked to implement a program involving animals and outside handlers **without clear statewide minimum standards**. Well-intentioned programs can quickly become problematic when guardrails are missing.

For these reasons, I urge you to **oppose HB 128/SB 299 in its current form** and require that more detailed, student-centered guidelines be developed before moving forward.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,
Trudy Tibbals