



February 3rd, 2026

Bill: House Bill 0128

Position: Support

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland School Psychologists' Association (MSPA), a professional organization representing about 500 Maryland School Psychologists. We advocate for the social-emotional, behavioral, and academic well being of Maryland students, families, and communities.

School psychologists provide comprehensive psychological services to Maryland's students, including counseling, consultation, and assessment. We are acutely aware of the significant mental health needs of many of our students, and we are dedicated to helping to address those challenges. Unfortunately, the current Maryland school psychologist shortage prevents us from performing our role in a continuum of school and community based supports as envisioned by the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH).

HB0128 offers Maryland a practical, compassionate way to expand student mental-health supports without creating new costs. Community therapy dog organizations—such as People Animal Love, Pet Partners, Pets on Wheels, Fidos for Freedom, and National Capital Therapy Dogs—already provide trained handlers and dogs free of charge. Schools and other public facilities do not pay fees for these visits, making therapy dogs a quality resource for students who are experiencing stress, anxiety, or emotional distress. Supporting this bill simply opens the door for schools statewide to access help that is already available and proven.

Maryland also has a clear model for success. The Court Dog Program, enacted in 2020, has shown how therapy dogs can effectively support youth in high-stress environments within the judicial system. HB0128 builds on that success by allowing schools to replicate a program that already works—while ensuring participation is always voluntary. By extending access to therapy dogs in educational settings, this legislation promotes emotional well-being, equity across counties, and common-sense use of a no-cost, evidence-based support. For these reasons, HB0128 is a thoughtful step forward and deserves support.

MSPA therefore requests a favorable report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura M. Grubb, PhD
Chair, Legislative Committee
Maryland School Psychologists' Association