



Maryland Youth Advisory Council
c/o Governor's Office for Children
45 Calvert Street,
Annapolis, MD 21401

Graham Snyder, *Chair*
Joyce Yun, *Vice-Chair*
Qamryn Askew, *Legislative Chair*

January 31, 2026

*House Bill 128 - County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs - Policy for Handling and Use in Schools
Ways and Means Committee*

Dear Chair Wilkins and the Ways and Means Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) supports House Bill 128, County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs - Policy for Handling and Use in Schools. We appreciate the bill's intent of promoting student emotional well-being and fostering supportive learning environments.

MYAC understands that many students experience stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges that can negatively affect their academic performance and overall school experience. Therapy dogs have been scientifically shown to reduce stress, provide comfort, and help students regulate their emotions, particularly for those who may struggle with trauma and emotional needs. In a randomized trial of elementary schoolers, a single twenty minute therapy dog session reduced the students' stress hormone levels by roughly 16%, and over a four week period, students with therapy dog sessions avoided the significant increase in stress levels observed in students without those sessions.¹ In addition, the presence of trained and certified therapy dogs in schools can help foster a calmer and more inclusive environment that supports the mental and emotional health of students.

House Bill 128 prioritizes school safety alongside the benefits of therapy dogs by requiring county boards of education to adopt clear policies governing their use in public schools. By including requirements for certified or registered therapy dogs, trained handlers, student and parental notification, and accommodations for students and staff with allergies or discomfort around dogs, the bill ensures that school therapy dogs are implemented responsibly.

We support this approach, believing that allowing local school systems to establish handling guidelines while expanding access to emotional support resources will benefit students across Maryland. The bill encourages student mental health while respecting safety, health, and individual needs within school communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Jin", written in a cursive style.

Peter Jin
Member, Maryland Youth Advisory Council

¹Meints, K., Brelsford, V. L., Dimolareva, M., Maréchal, L., Pennington, K., Rowan, E., & Gee, N. R. (2022). Can dogs reduce stress levels in school children? Effects of dog-assisted interventions on salivary cortisol in children with and without special educational needs using randomized controlled trials. PLOS ONE, 17(6), e0269333. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269333>