



MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Expanding Opportunity and Unleashing Potential

850 Hungerford Drive ♦ Room 123 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850

BILL: HB0981
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs - Certification and Use in Schools
DATE: 3/6/2020
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AN AMENDMENT
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
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The Montgomery County Board of Education (Board) **supports** HB0981 **with an amendment**.

This bill would require each school district to develop a policy to allow the use of therapy dogs in all schools in the county. Therapy dogs have been shown to effectively support students emotional needs on a daily basis and during highly emotional situations, including the death of a student or staff member. The therapeutic effect of such animals has been witnessed first-hand in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).

MCPS Regulation ACG-RC Service Animals in Schools was developed to comply with federal regulation (28 C.F.R. 35-136) which requires that public entities modify policies, practices and procedures to permit the use of a service animal by an individual with a disability. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) technical bulletin (#29, July 2011), benchmarked guidelines from Virginia and other advocacy materials and MCPS used them to develop ACG-RC in compliance with the federal regulation. The American Kennel Club and the Alliance for Therapy Dogs also provide good resources on this topic.

The Board supports the legislation but respectfully request an amendment that would direct MSDE to develop a model policy that includes requirements such as, but not limited to:

- how to determine if an animal qualifies as a service animal
- requirements for the animal, such as training and handler controls
- arrangements for care of the animal during the school day
- liability for any harm or injury caused by the animal to other students, staff, visitors, and/or property
- removal or exclusion of a service animal

Therapy dogs also must remain in a confined space due to concerns about allergies for students and staff members

For these reasons, the Board **supports this legislation with an amendment** and urges a favorable report.