



PO Box 44176
Baltimore MD 21236
443-977-9726
PetsOnWheels.org

February 4, 2021

Chair Kaiser and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of the board and volunteers for Pets on Wheels, I am writing to request your support for Delegate Guyton's bill to allow and encourage engaging therapy dogs in all county schools.

At Pets on Wheels, we know firsthand the incredible impact that visits with therapy pets can have for our students. We regularly work with schools and libraries already with our reading programs and increases of up to 30% in literacy are seen because of those sessions with therapy pets. And we are also already working in schools across the state in other ways to make an impact.

In Southern Maryland, we are working with select schools to help keep at risk students engaged and in class, with a focus on elementary and middle school children. In Harford County, we are part of the curriculum in classes with students who have unique needs. Our therapy pet teams work in elementary, middle and high schools throughout the state.

All told, there are 57 schools that have current active partnerships with Pets on Wheels. In some areas, additional schools are actually wait-listed due to the demand for therapy pet visits. Just last year we partnered with the Maryland SPCA to work to certify more therapy pet teams because so many schools have seen the positive impact of therapy pets and want to add them to their programs. We have had no negative experiences working in the schools, and in fact our therapy pet teams are usually consider the highlight of the week for the students and teachers.

Each of our teams of handler and pet are evaluated rigorously to participate as a certified Pets on Wheels therapy pet team. Our handlers are background checked when they apply; pets are subject to annual health certificate requirements and teams are evaluated for temperament and suitability every two years. We carry liability insurance along with accident insurance for our volunteer teams, and have an extensive volunteer protocol and strict Code of Ethics that all of our teams are required to follow.

Pets on Wheels and our partnerships with so many schools show that therapy pets make sense in our schools. We know that there are even more students who can benefit from the power of a therapy pet, and we encourage our legislature to support your bill. School can be hard, but letting a therapy pet share a little love can go a long way toward making it easier, and making our students more successful.

Thank you for supporting our important work,

Gina Kazimir, Executive Director
Pets on Wheels