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**Testimony in Support of H.B. 713
Presented to the Ways and Means Committee February 10, 2021**

I am writing on behalf of House Bill 713, allowing the use of therapy dogs in public schools in Maryland. My name is Katie Flory, and I am the Community Relations Director with the Maryland SPCA in Baltimore City.

According to the to the Census Bureau, ACS 5-year estimates 2010-2015, 2015 Brief Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, **42%** of adults in Baltimore have experienced three or more Adverse Childhood Experiences compared to **24%** Statewide. Trauma is a huge issue in our community and this bill would add a much-needed resource.

For the last 4 years the Maryland SPCA's Wagging Tales program has provided programming in four Baltimore City Schools. This programming includes literacy skills as well as social emotional learning. We use therapy teams (person and dog) to help the kids practice their reading skills as well as learn kindness to animals and people. During our time in these schools, we have encountered many children who have experienced trauma in their personal lives which make learning more of a challenge. We have found when there is a dog present the kids feel more secure and comfortable. We have also found kids are more engaged in lessons and are better behaved.

We currently have 15 therapy teams and have been able to navigate any challenges based on our knowledge and experience working with animals for 151 years. Representatives from the Maryland SPCA would be happy to advise, help and support any district creating policy for this much needed resource.

Thank you for your time and we urge the Committee to give a favorable report of H.B. 713.