
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5039

AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED SERVICES.

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF), by July 1, 2014 and within available appropriations, to develop and implement training for certain department staff and mental health care providers on the benefits of animal-assisted activity and a canine disaster stress relief team. The bill extends, from January 1, 2014 to July 1, 2014, a requirement that DCF develop and implement such training on (1) the healing value of the human-animal bond for children, (2) the value of therapy animals in dealing with traumatic situations, and (3) the benefit of animal-assisted therapy (rather than an animal-assisted therapy program, as required by current law.) It does not specify which staff or providers must receive the training.

Additionally, the bill (1) extends, from January 1, 2014 to October 1, 2014, the deadline by which the DCF commissioner must consult with the Department of Agriculture commissioner to identify a coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team and (2) renames the team a "volunteer canine disaster stress relief team." By law, the team must be available to provide animal-assisted therapy within 24 hours of receiving notice to do so.

The bill also requires DCF, by January 1, 2015 and within available appropriations, to consult with the Governor's Prevention Partnership and the animal-assisted therapy community to develop an animal-assisted activity program to provide animal-assisted therapy and animal-assisted activity to children and youths living with trauma and loss. It eliminates a requirement that DCF, by July 1, 2014 and in consultation with the above entities, develop a crisis response program using coordinated volunteer canine response team services to provide animal assisted-therapy to such children and youths.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

DEFINITIONS

The bill defines:

1. "animal-assisted activity" as an activity that involves registered therapy animals interacting with people within the state (presumably, an animal-assisted activity organization registers the therapy animals) and
2. "canine disaster stress relief team" as an entity consisting of handlers and canines that an animal-assisted activity organization has trained, evaluated, and registered to provide aid to people during and after traumatic events.

Under current law, an "animal-assisted activity organization" is an entity involved in training, evaluating, and registering members of the animal-assisted therapy community. The bill requires such an entity to be nationally recognized.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 11 Nay 1 (03/04/2014)