



House Bill No. 6725

Public Act No. 15-208

AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Section 17a-22ee of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

(a) For purposes of this section: [,]

(1) "Animal-assisted activity" means any activity that involves a team consisting of a registered handler and therapy animal interacting with individuals in the state;

(2) ["animal-assisted therapy"] "Animal-assisted therapy" means goal-directed intervention in which [animals are] a team consisting of a therapist and a therapy animal, or a therapist, registered handler and a therapy animal, is used as an integral part of the [crisis response] therapy process to aid individuals who have (A) experienced mental, physical or emotional trauma, (B) witnessed, or have been a victim of, an act of violence, or (C) behavioral health care needs;

(3) ["animal-assisted therapy community"] "Animal-assisted activity community" means the local or regional entities capable of providing animal-assisted therapy or animal-assisted activities to individuals within the state; [and]

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(4) ["animal-assisted activity organization"] "Animal-assisted activity organization" means any entity involved in training, evaluating [and] or registering members of the animal-assisted [therapy] activity community; [.]

(5) "Animal-assisted critical incident response team" means a team of registered handlers and therapy animals that (A) has been identified by the Department of Children and Families, and (B) is capable of providing animal-assisted activities to individuals during and after traumatic events;

(6) "Registered handler" means an individual who has been screened, trained and registered by a national animal therapy organization to engage in animal-assisted activities or animal-assisted therapy, or both;

(7) "Therapist" means any (A) physician licensed pursuant to chapter 370 who specializes in psychiatry, (B) psychologist or professional counselor licensed pursuant to chapter 383, (C) marital and family therapist licensed pursuant to chapter 383a, or (D) clinical social worker or master social worker licensed pursuant to chapter 383b; and

(8) "Therapy animal" means any animal trained to provide comfort to individuals who have (A) experienced mental, physical or emotional trauma, (B) witnessed, or have been a victim of, an act of violence, or (C) behavioral health care needs.

(b) Not later than January 1, [2014] 2016, the Commissioner of Children and Families shall, within available appropriations, develop and implement training for certain employees of the Department of Children and Families and mental health care providers 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

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[benefit of an] benefits of animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy. [program.]

(c) Not later than January 1, [2014] 2016, the Commissioner of Children and Families, in consultation with the Commissioner of Agriculture and within available appropriations, shall [identify a coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team. Such team shall consist of various handlers and canines that have been trained, evaluated and registered by an animal-assisted activity organization to provide aid to individuals during and after traumatic events] develop a protocol to identify and mobilize animal-assisted critical incident response teams throughout the state. Such [team] teams shall operate on a volunteer basis and shall be available to provide animal-assisted [therapy] activities to individuals during and after traumatic events within twenty-four hours of receiving notice to do so.

(d) Not later than July 1, [2014] 2016, the Commissioner of Children and Families, in consultation with [the Governor's Prevention Partnership and] the animal-assisted [therapy] activity community, shall, within available appropriations, develop [a crisis response program utilizing the services of the coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team identified pursuant to subsection (c) of this section to provide] a protocol to (1) identify and credential animal-assisted activity organizations and providers of animal-assisted therapy in the state, and (2) utilize animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy to provide aid to children and youths living with trauma and loss.

Approved July 6, 2015