



17 / Feb / 2015

Committee on Children
State Capitol Building, Room 011
Hartford, CT 06106

Via E-Mail: kidtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Dear Members of the Committee on Children,

RE: H.B. No. 6725 (RAISED), AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES.

My name is Brad Cole. I am the Executive Director of K9 First Responders, Inc. ("K9FR") located in Milford, CT. My testimony is on behalf of our Connecticut members and in support of H.B. No. 6725 (RAISED), AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES.

Agency Background: K9FR is a non-profit canine critical incident response organization. We provide Critical Incident Mental Health Support to those impacted by a crisis, disaster, violence and other related events. Handlers trained in crisis mental/behavioral health management deploy with specially trained dogs as first responders.

K9FR teams bridge the gap between a critical incident and the mobilization, arrival and availability of mental health agencies. Teams connect and engage with impacted individuals laying the groundwork for the acceptance of mental/behavioral health services.

We are response partners with the municipalities of Milford, CT, Fairfield, CT and Boston, MA. K9FR deployments included the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy, Boston Marathon bombing, Fairfield Train Derailment and a school homicide in Milford, CT. Our teams have been requested by and supported a variety of schools after traumatic events.

Position: Raised Bill No. 6725 brings the existing bill's language into conformity with the therapy animal, mental/behavioral health and crisis response communities' terminology. These clarifications provide language continuity consistent with other private and public crisis response agencies. Commonly accepted definitions and terminology promote a professional and unified mobilization of services.



The raised bill also clarifies the definition of "Animal-assisted critical incident response team", "Registered handler" and "Therapy animal". These clarifications are important as they assist crisis response agencies in clearly identifying authorized responding therapy animal teams.

Lastly, this raised bill clarifies that on-going animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy provided to children and youths living with trauma and loss should only be done while under the direct supervision of a mental health professional. An individual under the treatment of a professional mental/behavioral health practitioner should not participate in an animal assisted therapy program unless it is under the direct supervision of that therapist. To do so otherwise risks inconsistent treatment sessions, increases the risk of contradictory treatments and increases negative patient outcomes.

I urge you to pass this bill in its present format. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Bradford J Cole

Executive Director
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