

February 16, 2015

RE: **Raised Bill No. 6725**

AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES

Dear Members of the Committee on Children,

I am writing to voice my support of H.B. 6725. You may have recently read about the benefits of using companion animals to brighten and improve the well-being of nursing home residents, hospital patients, children, and most recently those involved in crisis situations. This work is near and dear to my heart.

Currently, I am the Vice-President of Tails of Joy, Inc. ("Tails"). Tails is an all-volunteer animal assisted therapy group serving Hartford, Tolland and Windham counties. The organization was established in 1995 to provide therapy visits with dogs, and other animals, to those who need comfort or company in settings such as assisted living facilities, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, veterans groups, and college and high school campuses.

After the tragedy that occurred at Sandy Hook, Tails formed a committee to work diligently on developing training and evaluation protocols for our own internal process of crisis response practices. In the Spring of 2014, Tails certified nine (9) Crisis Response Teams. My dog, Vinny, and I are one of those teams. As a crisis response team, we have participated in several call-outs and all teams participated in the large-scale Douglas Manor MCI Drill in May 2014.

I am fortunate to have an animal that has the ability to provide comfort and stress relief to those in need. By being involved in a vigil, and being present at a wake of high school student, I have seen first-hand the good of animal assisted work, and so have those who have been in attendance at these events and observed from a distance.

Tails' goal, along with its' certified teams, is to help ensure that the legislation is clear and consistent with the animal assisted activities and therapeutic work currently being done in the aftermath of a tragedy in our state. Those deploying teams to crisis situations need to know that we are trained and certified, and take our work seriously.

I thank you for considering my testimony on this important piece of legislation.

Michelle A. Finnegan
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- ❖ Vice-President of Tails of Joy, Inc.
- ❖ Member of Animal Crisis Response Team



Vinny