

February 13, 2015

**Committee on Children Public Hearing Testimony**

***Raised Bill No. 6725 AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES***

Dear members of the Committee on Children, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify IN SUPPORT of H.B. 6725.

I am the current President of Tails of Joy, Inc., an all-volunteer animal assisted therapy group serving Hartford, Tolland and Windham counties that 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. Tails of Joy began our own internal process of developing Crisis Response Teams in the spring of 2013. Since then we have developed training and evaluation protocols for our Crisis Response Teams, with nine teams currently assessed and approved for this type of call-out. Some of our teams have participated in several call-outs and all teams participated in the large-scale Douglas Manor MCI Drill in May 2014.

Tails of Joy has collaborated with State Representative Diana Urban and other therapy groups throughout the state to draft proposed language changes to the original legislation. Our goal was to help ensure that the legislation be clear and that it be consistent with some of the animal assisted activities and therapeutic work currently being done in the aftermath of a tragedy in our state. We also wanted to ensure that the legislation was divided into three distinct parts: The training of Department of Children and Families staff on the healing value of the human-animal bond, the statewide coordinated volunteer animal critical incident response team and the provision of ongoing animal assisted therapy by mental health professionals. The proposed language in Raised Bill No. 6725 accomplishes all of that!

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

Respectfully submitted,

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