

To Members of the Children's Committee, this is written testimony in support of H.B. No. 6725 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES.

My name is Kate Nicoll, LCSW and I have been a social worker in the state of Connecticut for over twenty years. For eleven years, as director of Soul Friends: Animal Assisted Therapy Programs of Connecticut, I have provided animal assisted therapy services to children living with trauma and loss. Our agency of clinicians has seen over 6,000 children and provided over 1,200 therapy animal visits just in the last year alone. We have worked collaboratively with Tails of Joy, K9 First Responders and other groups to support this legislation. At Soul Friends, we have a commitment to provide the specialized services of animal assisted therapy to children in need.

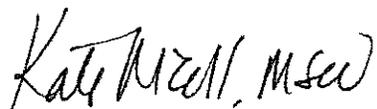
We have seen the benefits with stories of how a therapy animal has brought comfort to those living with trauma and loss, but at Soul Friends we also have demonstrated outcomes that our therapy animal programs bring an increased sense of hopefulness to children. In the literature, hopefulness is tied to resilience – and that is the very goal wished for with children living with trauma. Animal assisted therapy at times of a critical incident and for ongoing trauma can bring the kind of comfort that traditional mental health services are often unable to do.

As part of a response to Cheshire High School following the tragic murder of a previous student, Soul Friends received thanks from many pupils and parents for the comforting presence therapy dogs had on their coping with an acute traumatic loss. Animal Assisted therapy at a time of crisis provided support, comfort and an outlet for emotional expression for both children and adults.

As outlined in H.B. NO 6725 ongoing animal assisted therapy for those living with trauma is best supervised by a mental health clinician, with knowledge of the human-animal bond and animal assisted therapy, who can utilize trauma-informed practices for best outcomes.

I whole-heartedly support all components of the legislation including: training for Department of Children and Families workers on the healing benefits of the human-animal bond; establishment of a critical incident therapy animal response teams in the state; and ongoing animal assisted therapy services under the supervision of a mental health provider. It is my hope, that for the children living with trauma and loss, you will support this legislation to bring the comfort of therapy animal visitation.

Respectfully submitted,



Kate Nicoll, MSW, LCSW

Founder and Chief Executive Officer

Soul Friends, Inc: Animal Assisted Therapy Programs of CT