

Testimony of Sandra L. Lok, Past President, Tails of Joy, Inc.
Raised Bill No. 6725
Committee on Children

February 17, 2015

Madam Chairs and Members of the Committee:

I am Sandra Lok, of Manchester, CT, and write to you in favor of Raised Bill No. 6725 - An Act Concerning Animal-Assisted Therapy Services.

Thank you for the opportunity to write, and also for your leadership and initiative in the passage of the original legislation related to the provision of animal-assisted therapy in CT.

I write on behalf of Tails of Joy, a well established, nonprofit CT organization made up of some sixty volunteers who provide animal assisted activities and therapy throughout Eastern and Central Connecticut with human-animal teams who are registered and reevaluated every two years through one of two nationally recognized animal therapy organizations. We voluntarily provide our services in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, libraries, etc, places where there are individuals who would greatly benefit from interacting with an animal. Prior to any visits, our dogs must be properly groomed, bathed and deemed healthy.

Among the many lessons learned after the horrific tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, is the fact that CT was in need of a statewide coordinated animal assisted crisis response network or team to ensure that teams of animals and handlers met minimal standards of proper training, good health, reliable behaviors, ethical conduct, etc, before being allowed to interact with our citizens who had been traumatized.

The legislation passed a short time later helped to do that, and the revisions before you ensure it.

Since passage of the original legislation, the leadership of TOJ has worked tirelessly on a statewide level and within its own organization to help meet the intent of the legislation and to help ensure the availability of teams from within our own state who could be called upon to volunteer to offer comfort with animals after a tragedy.

We have coordinated and facilitated statewide meetings with similar established CT organizations and individuals. Out of these meetings came recommendations for minimal standards that all teams must meet prior to being called upon to offer comfort to our state residents who had been traumatized. Also, out of these meetings came much of the proposed language revisions that are before you today. Our goal in offering the proposed revisions was to ensure that the legislation was clear and concise and that it offered three distinct components: The training of DCF workers on the healing value of human-animal bonds, the statewide coordinated volunteer animal critical incident response team and the provision of ongoing animal assisted therapy by professionals. The language before you meets these goals.

Within Tails of Joy, we have taken nine experienced canine/handler teams through training specifically designed for responding after a tragedy, including Psychological First Aid, and have evaluated their ability to comfort individuals who have suffered trauma. These teams have responded to callouts and

offered their comfort to students and staff at local high schools after untimely student deaths. The teams were called upon to participate in a wide-scale drill at the Douglas Manor Nursing Home where the scenario was that a small personal aircraft had hit the building. Our trained and experienced teams were on hand to offer comfort to First Responders, Red Cross personnel and individuals who gathered to await word on the fate of their loved ones.

Raised Bill No. 6725 clearly defines animal assisted therapy services and ensures a minimal standard in the delivery of such services so that CT residents who have suffered trauma are offered comfort by not just anyone, but by fully vetted, well-trained teams of animals with handlers who have a vested interest in the well being of our citizens.

Please support Raised Bill No. 6725.

Thank you.

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