

February 13, 2016

Committee on Children Public Hearing Testimony

Raised Bill No. 5140 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF THERAPY ANIMALS TO COMFORT CHILDREN TESTIFYING IN CERTAIN CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS

Dear members of the Committee on Children, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify IN SUPPORT of H.B. 5140.

I am the current President of Tails of Joy, Inc., an all-volunteer animal assisted therapy group primarily 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. I am employed by Our Companions Animal Rescue, serving as their Community Programs Manager responsible for our adoption, rehoming and feral cat programs.

Tails of Joy has collaborated with State Representative Diana Urban and representatives of the Department of Children and Families to provide compelling information, including the fact that twenty-six states now have courthouse dogs, several of which rely on registered therapy dogs. This proposed legislation relies on the same definitions used with the crisis response legislation that is now law, a bill I was actively involved in contributing to as a member of the Tails of Joy Crisis Response Committee.

Raised Bill No. 5140 allows for “the use of therapy animals to provide comfort to children who are testifying in a criminal prosecution of an offense involving assault, sexual assault or abuse of a child twelve years of age or younger”, and that “a therapy animal and handler, as defined in section 17a-22ee, with whom the child feels comfortable shall be permitted to sit in close proximity to the child during the child’s testimony, provided such therapy animal shall not obscure the child from the view of the defendant or the trier of fact”.

Having been a handler of registered therapy animals for over a decade, I believe relying on registered therapy teams who have met the criteria for crisis response work is critical to the success of this legislation.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Caroline K. Gaetano

89 LeMay Street, West Hartford, CT 06107

President and Animal Assisted Crisis Response Team Member, Tails of Joy, Inc.

Community Programs Manager, Our Companions Animal Rescue

Member, CT Votes for Animals