

Dear Representatives:

My name is Elisabeth Holder and I belong to Tails of Joy -- an organization of therapy dog handlers in central Connecticut. I am writing in support of HB 5140. My dog and I visit several nursing homes to comfort patients and participate in R.E.A.D. (an international reading program) at local libraries. In addition we regularly help struggling readers at the Discovery Academy elementary school in Wethersfield.

Over and over again I have witnessed how touching and interacting with a dog relaxes people who are tense; I have seen children and adults who were withdrawn and silent become more animated and engaged with those around them; I have watched children hold on to my dog or pat her while they read along with ever improving facility.

I have a friend who is a public defender. I know that one part of his job that causes him the most anguish is cross-examining child victims in court or during depositions. These children have generally been through terrible experiences and asking them to relive the details can be emotionally devastating. If there is a clear way to alleviate some of that distress, I strongly believe that this relief should be provided.

In those cases where children have expressed interest in having a dog present or where they have been given previous support by a trained therapy dog, I believe that granting children this support during their testimony is a very good idea. I therefore ask that you support HB 5140 -An Act Concerning the Use of Therapy Animals to Comfort Children Testifying in Certain Criminal Prosecutions during this legislative session.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Holder

Long Lane

Middletown, CT 06457