



## HB981 COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION - THERAPY DOGS - CERTIFICATION AND USE IN SCHOOLS

March 6, 2020

WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

### OPPOSE

Jeanette Ortiz, Esq., Legislative & Policy Counsel (410.703.5352)

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **HB981 County Boards of Education - Therapy Dogs - Certification and Use in Schools**. This bill requires each county board of education to allow the use of therapy dogs in public schools in the county; and requiring county boards to adopt a policy for the use of therapy dogs in schools in the county.

AACPS complies with both State and federal law in providing for the use of service animals to individuals with disabilities. Therapy and emotional support dogs are not covered under the scope of these laws. Emotional support animals, comfort animals, and therapy dogs are not service animals under Title II and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Accordingly, this bill would expand the scope and complexity of student supports that a school would be required to manage without requiring a documented need for this support. While HB981 defines “therapy dog” as a dog that is “certified” to provide affection and comfort to children who need emotional support in a school setting, there currently is not a legally recognized “certification” for this purpose. As such, HB981 would leave open to interpretation what dogs could serve as therapy dogs. The bill also creates the risk of having disruptive dogs that are not trained causing a disturbance at schools and potential harm to students, teachers, and staff. Having such a dog in schools could have the unintended consequences of creating additional issues for children who are already in need of emotional support.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on HB981.