

**ASSEMBLY, No. 906**

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**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

**217th LEGISLATURE**

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PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2016 SESSION

**Sponsored by:**

**Assemblywoman VALERIE VAINIERI HUTTLE**

**District 37 (Bergen)**

**Assemblywoman PATRICIA EGAN JONES**

**District 5 (Camden and Gloucester)**

**SYNOPSIS**

Establishes pilot program in DCF providing animal-assisted therapy to victims of childhood violence, trauma, or children with behavioral health care needs; appropriates \$100,000.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.



**(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 11/15/2016)**

1    **AN ACT** establishing an animal-assisted therapy pilot program and  
2       making an appropriation.

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4       **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*  
5       *of New Jersey:*

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7       1. As used in this act:

8       "Animal-assisted therapy" means a goal-directed intervention in  
9       which therapy animals are used as an integral part of the treatment  
10      process for children who have experienced mental, physical, or  
11      emotional trauma; have witnessed, or are victims of, an act of  
12      violence; or have behavioral health care needs.

13      "Therapy animal" means a non-task trained dog that has received  
14      training to provide support to a person who has experienced mental,  
15      physical, or emotional trauma; has witnessed, or is a victim of, an  
16      act of violence; or has behavioral health care needs.

17

18      2. The Commissioner of Children and Families shall establish a  
19      three-year animal-assisted therapy pilot program to provide  
20      emotional support to children who have experienced mental,  
21      physical, or emotional trauma; have witnessed, or are victims of, an  
22      act of violence; or have behavioral health care needs and are  
23      receiving services from the Divisions of Children's System of Care  
24      or Child Protection and Permanency in the Department of Children  
25      and Families. The commissioner shall establish the pilot program  
26      in the northern, central, and southern regions of the State,  
27      respectively.

28      The commissioner shall solicit proposals from community-based  
29      organizations interested in participating in the pilot program. The  
30      commissioner shall review the proposals and contract with the  
31      organizations whose proposals best meet the objectives of the  
32      program. The commissioner shall give preference to organizations  
33      that provide animal-assisted therapy services at the time the  
34      proposals are solicited pursuant to this section.

35

36      3. a. The pilot program shall be designed to improve the  
37      therapeutic outcomes of victims of childhood trauma or violence  
38      and children with behavioral healthcare needs, and promote the  
39      healing benefits of human-animal bonding by providing animal-  
40      assisted therapy services to children who meet the eligibility  
41      requirements provided in section 3 of this act.

42      b. The community-based organizations that are selected by the  
43      commissioner to participate in the pilot program shall:

44      (1) provide animal-assisted therapy to children who have  
45      experienced mental, physical, or emotional trauma; have witnessed,  
46      or are victims of, an act of violence; or have behavioral health care  
47      needs and are receiving services from the Divisions of Children's  
48      System of Care or Child Protection and Permanency;

1 (2) educate, and provide information to, health care  
2 professionals, mental health providers, Division of Child Protection  
3 and Permanency caseworkers, and behavioral health providers  
4 contracted with the Division of Children's System of Care on the  
5 healing value of therapy animals in dealing with traumatic events,  
6 including the value of the human-animal bond for children, and the  
7 benefits of animal-assisted therapy;

8 (3) allow for collaboration with health care professionals,  
9 mental health providers, Division of Child Protection and  
10 Permanency caseworkers, and behavioral health providers  
11 contracted with the Division of Children's System of Care to  
12 incorporate animal-assisted therapy into the formulation of  
13 treatment modalities for, and the therapy or case plans of, children  
14 who have experienced mental, physical, or emotional trauma; have  
15 witnessed, or are victims of, an act of violence; or have behavioral  
16 health care needs;

17 (4) provide interactive empathetic training activities with  
18 therapy animals;

19 (5) develop a coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team  
20 to provide post traumatic debriefing and counseling services during  
21 and after traumatic events to victims of childhood trauma or  
22 violence; and

23 (6) establish and implement a training and certification program  
24 for the volunteer and canine members of the canine response team  
25 developed pursuant to subparagraph (5) of this subsection.

26 c. The community-based organizations that are selected by the  
27 commissioner to participate in the pilot program shall possess the  
28 staff to engage in animal-assisted therapy and provide the services  
29 listed in subsection b. of this section.

30

31 4. a. Subject to the guidelines adopted by the commissioner for  
32 the pilot program, a Division of Child Protection and Permanency  
33 caseworker, behavioral health provider contracted with the Division  
34 of Children's System of Care, school employee, health care  
35 professional, mental health provider, or health care facility may  
36 refer a child to the pilot program if the child meets all the eligibility  
37 requirements provided in subsection b. of this section.

38 b. A child shall be eligible to participate in the pilot program if  
39 the child:

40 (1) is between 5 and 21 years of age;

41 (2) has experienced mental, physical, or emotional trauma; has  
42 witnessed, or is a victim of, an act of violence; or

43 (3) has behavioral health care needs and is receiving services  
44 from the Divisions of Children's System of Care or Child Protection  
45 and Permanency; and

46 (3) the child's parent voluntarily consents to enroll the child in  
47 the program, as appropriate.



1 received training to provide support to a person who has  
2 experienced mental, physical, emotional trauma; has witnessed, or  
3 is a victim of, an act of violence; or has behavioral health care  
4 needs.

5 Under the bill's provisions, the community-based organizations  
6 selected by the commissioner to participate in the pilot program  
7 would: provide animal-assisted therapy to children who have  
8 experienced mental, physical, or emotional trauma; have witnessed,  
9 or are victims of, an act of violence, or have behavioral health care  
10 needs and are receiving services from DCSOC or DCPD; educate,  
11 and provide information to, health care professionals, mental health  
12 providers, DCPD caseworkers, and behavioral health providers  
13 contracted with DCSOC on the healing value of therapy animals in  
14 dealing with traumatic events, including the value of the human-  
15 animal bond for children, and the benefits of animal-assisted  
16 therapy; allow for collaboration with health care professionals,  
17 mental health providers, DCPD caseworkers, and behavioral health  
18 providers contracted with DCSOC to incorporate animal-assisted  
19 therapy into the formulation of treatment modalities for, and the  
20 therapy or case plans of, children who have experienced mental,  
21 physical, or emotional trauma; have witnessed, or are victims of, an  
22 act of violence, or have behavioral health care needs; provide  
23 interactive empathetic training activities with therapy animals;  
24 develop a coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team to  
25 provide post traumatic debriefing and counseling services during  
26 and after traumatic events to victims of childhood trauma or  
27 violence; establish and implement a training and certification  
28 program for the volunteer and canine members of the canine  
29 response team established pursuant to the bill; and possess the staff  
30 to engage in animal-assisted therapy and provide the services  
31 outlined in the bill.

32 Subject to the guidelines adopted by the commissioner for the  
33 pilot program, a DCPD caseworker, behavioral health provider  
34 contracted with the DCSOC, school employee, health care  
35 professional, mental health provider, or health care facility may  
36 refer a child to the pilot program if the child: is between 5 and 21  
37 years of age; has experienced mental, physical, or emotional  
38 trauma; has witnessed, or is a victim of, an act of violence; or has  
39 behavioral health care needs and is receiving services from DCSOC  
40 or DCPD; and the child's parent voluntarily consents to enroll the  
41 child in the program, as appropriate.

42 The bill directs the commissioner to apply for and accept any  
43 grant of money from the State or federal government, private  
44 foundations, or other sources, which may be available for animal-  
45 assisted therapy programs.

46 The bill requires the commissioner to compile data to determine  
47 the effectiveness of the pilot program in providing animal-assisted  
48 therapy to the children who participate in the pilot program, and

**A906 VAINIERI HUTTLE, JONES**

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1    within one year of the expiration of the bill, submit a report to the  
2    Governor and the Legislature on the effectiveness of the pilot  
3    program and make recommendations on how the program can be  
4    replicated throughout the State.

5       Finally, the bill appropriates \$100,000 from the general fund to  
6    DCF to implement the provisions of the bill.