

ASSEMBLY, No. 3282

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 25, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman VALERIE VAINIERI HUTTLE

District 37 (Bergen)

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

As introduced.



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.

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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.

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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.

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31 4. a. Subject to the guidelines adopted by the commissioner
32 for the pilot program, a Division of Child Protection and
33 Permanency caseworker, behavioral health provider contracted with
34 the Division of Children's System of Care, school employee, health
35 care professional, mental health provider, or health care facility
36 may refer a child to the pilot program if the child meets all the
37 eligibility 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 (4) the child's parent voluntarily consents to enroll the child in
47 the program, as appropriate.

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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

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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.