

PA13-114

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**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**CHILDREN
PART 3
642 - 977**

2013

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They're more concrete mental health service areas that we looked at rather than policy areas, in all honesty.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Okay. Thank you, Senator.

Any last questions?

Okay. Well thank you very much for your testimony.

SENATOR HARP: Thank you.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Okay. That is end of our list for public officials that will be speaking. We now are going to go to the list of the public and we ask you when you come forward to please state your name for the record. If there's a group that you are representing, please state that as well. And all comments will be kept to three minutes and then you may have an opportunity, if questions are asked, to expand upon that.

So, first we'll have Kate Nicoll followed by Sheryl Sprague.

KATE NICOLL: Good morning, Madam Chairpersons and members of the Children's Committee. I am here today in support of Bill 6465, An Act Concerning Animal Assisted Therapy. My name is Kate Nicoll. I'm a licensed clinical social worker, and founder, and Chief Executive Officer of Soul Friends, Animal Assisted Therapy Programs of Connecticut.

Sandy Hook taught us that animal assisted therapy works. The benefits of the human animal bond can comfort children and families and first responders at the time of an unthinkable tragedy. Animals simply know what to do when we are feeling powerless and

overwhelmed.

Within a few hours of the Sandy Hook tragedy, Soul Friends staff contacted 211 to alert them to our state's only trained crisis response animal therapy team. We were thankful for the support from our out-of-state teams but Connecticut's own crisis response therapy dog team only responded to the needs of Newtown almost two weeks after the event. In our state, we had a listing of hundreds of teams willing to volunteer their time. Some who responded had only a few months of volunteer training. Hundreds of teams had a complex rating recognized by the Delta Society Pet Partners, a national registry of animals assisted therapy teams.

Many wonderful people were on the ground volunteering with their therapy animals and did good things for those in need. But for future events, it would be most beneficial to have a volunteer crisis response therapy dog team as part of our own state's first responders.

How does animal assisted therapy work? Who does it help? And how? And how well are our teams trained? These are the questions of results based accountability. And our state in -- in -- in state resources in animal assisted therapy have the answers. There are more than six in state agencies providing animal assisted therapy to our children.

At Soul Friends, we had a team of eight mental health clinicians providing animal assisted therapy for almost ten years to serving over 5,700 children. And at least 50 percent of those children are under the care of DCF. These are often children who do not respond to traditional mental health therapy. But with

the help of a canine assisted, or equine assisted therapy partner, the children can share their innermost thoughts. Like Bear loves me, so I must be a good boy. From a boy with multiple foster care placements. Or I'm a better canine friend than a human friend. From a teen living with Aspergers.

It's time for Connecticut to recognize it's own expertise in the human animal bond and its ability to heal our children. We have been ahead of the curve in practice. Five years ago, Soul Friends staff contacted the DCF review board to explore a treatment modality that could use animals assisted therapy for children who witness or perpetrated animal abuse.

The study was rejected for concern there wasn't enough number of children. The Department of Children and Family needs more training in the human animal bond. We could have been a leader here. A recent study in Spain explored the positive impact of a dog's eye contact for children living with autism. At Soul Friends, eight years ago, we presented at an International Conference on Autism on how interaction with a therapy dog increased eye contact for children with special needs.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Miss Nicoll, I'm sorry. Could you please summarize?

KATE NICOLL: Yes. The point is animal assisted therapy produces positive outcomes for children in need. And our state has many of it's own experts in the field of human animal studies. As well as hundreds of volunteer therapy animal teams ready to support.

I strongly support the components of the bill that requests DCF, the Governor's Partnership

on Prevention, and the Department of Agriculture to recognize and gain support from experts in the field in animal assisted therapy. And to heed to our mission at Soul Friends that states our plan to heal the hearts of children one wagging tail at a time.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Thank you.

Questions?

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN: Thank you. Kate thank you so much for being here. And I know that you do tremendous work. And I'm just going to sort of expand a little bit on what you said. Research shows that children have a natural affinity for animals. So that a child who has been an at risk child, or a child who has been abused, will sometimes be able to reveal to a therapist what is bothering them because of the presence of animal.

And I think that when children asked who do you share your secrets with? One of the ones that they share their secrets with, if they have a family pet, is the family pet. So -- and I appreciate all the work and efforts that you have put into this. But in view of the fact that we are on CTN, we know that we're in difficult budget times. And we -- we're putting this within available appropriations.

I would like to make it known right now that we are looking for a public private partnership on this. And we would be more than happy to work with a foundation that would help us put together a team that is at the ready all the time. I know our wonderful Commissioner of DCF, Jetted Katz, was there when they had the therapy dogs. And she said

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it was amazing. That even parents were down on the ground with the dogs.

Just looking for that closeness. And that -- and that comfort. So, I'm hoping that we can move this forward. You have been out there working so hard on this. And get our own crisis team. And also use this animal therapy in DCF for at risk kids. So, this is just a comment to thank you for all the work. And this time maybe it's a charm. We can go forward with it.

KATE NICOLL: Thank you.

REP. URBAN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Thank you.

Questions from Committee?

Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you for -- for bringing this to our attention. A couple of questions I have is do any other states implement the program that you're proposing here?

KATE NICOLL: From what I understand there are two or three states that have their own crisis response therapy dog teams. Some of the teams are used -- they're under the judicial department, I think. But they're used for a death notifications and things of that nature. But a number of states do have that in place.

REP. BETTS: If there's any way you can give to the Committee -- you know -- the information as to which states?

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KATE NICOLL: I'll do that.

REP. BETTS: That would be -- that would be very helpful. As -- as well as how much money is allocated for implementing this? Whether it's a governmental function? Or whether it's public private partnership? That would also be useful.

KATE NICOLL: Okay.

REP. BETTS: Second part I have is I know how successful these programs are. But I'm very conflicted with trying to undertake a program like this is, Representative Urban had said, given the current climate. And given the, not the limited resources, the very tight resources that DCF has as well as the other state agencies.

And it gives me great pause to try and -- and lend support for this at this time. Unless we have an absolutely reliable dependable source of revenue on a multiyear basis. Because otherwise I think we're just setting ourselves up for disappointment. So, I'm hopeful that these other states will identify some other sources of -- of funding.

And it reflects no view on whether the program is good. I think it just reflects the economic reality of -- of today. So, I just wanted to comment about that. And thank you very much for bringing this to our attention.

KATE NICOLL: May I just respond with him? Is -- animal assisted therapy is also a billable service. So, it is something that as a licensed professional mental health person, I bill insurance for my visits that incorporate an animal in my clinical work. So the groups that we're proposing are really low cost

solutions to critical problems.

And I do have research that can demonstrate how a succession group, an eight session group, increase children's sense of hopefulness after eight or six sessions. How it improves empathy, and their peer relations. So, I do have research on that that I can put together in -- in a page. And present to you.

REP. BETTS: That would be wonderful. And again, I'm not questioning the merits of it. But I -- I am interested to hear if you could forward the committee the number of insurance companies, or type of coverage that their willing to pay for the use of animal therapy? That would also be very helpful to us in --

KATE NICOLL: Okay.

REP. BETTS: -- assessing this. Thank you.

KATE NICOLL: Thank you.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Okay. Thank you. So, for the benefit of our clerk's we have four questions for the record. One minute I'm sorry. For the -- from the questions from Representative Betts. If we could get from you and we're reading this into the record so that our clerk's remember to -- to make sure that we got it. If you have information on other states that have these programs, number one.

Number two, how do they tend to be funded, public or public private partnerships? Number three, do you have any research on the results of therapy sessions? And four, the insurance companies and what are kind of their criteria for billable services?

Other questions from Committee members?

Senator Linares.

SENATOR LINARES: Thank you.

And thank you very much for taking a leadership role in this issue. I -- I just had a question as to what the total amount of funds you think you needed? Or what's -- what is the cost that you think is sufficient to run this program?

KATE NICOLL: Well there's two components of the program. One is for the training of the crisis response therapy animals. And the training to have the national group come in to do it is like \$8,000. But we were looking at local -- other resources to -- to lower those costs to like \$2500 to do like a four -- a two to four day training for therapy animal teams that are interested in it. And they would be all volunteer based teams.

And then for the clinical part is -- we're proposing -- these groups are -- we are proposing doing a series of groups for children under the care of DCF. The groups that I do are eight session, psycho therapy groups, with measurable outcomes. And I only charge \$200 -- I mean \$2,500 for each eight session group. So, it's really a low cost treatment option serving -- you know -- up to 10 to 12 -- 12 children.

SENATOR LINARES: Great. Thank you very much.

KATE NICOLL: You're welcome.

SENATOR LINARES: I appreciate that information.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Okay.

And Representative Hoydick.

REP. HOYDICK: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for testifying today, Miss Nicoll. I -- I've been the observer of the benefits of animal therapy. And fairly recently, within the last year and a half, we were able to have the Governor's horse guard from Avon down to Stratford. And at the end of the military procedures that they did, there were several special ed and disabled children that were kept back. And they were allowed to interact with the horses and the -- and the guard members.

And it was very fulfilling. And very gratifying to see these young children. And -- and some were blind and some were paraplegic interact with these animals. These animals that were so big, yet so gentle. And knowing that we are always struggling for the guard to have funding, their part of the National Guard Service, I believe. And we -- I think we've reduced our heard size.

This is a great interest to me to have this volunteer group become partners with you in that public private partnership that you mentioned. In order to get the training and then be able to provide the -- be participate in these sessions at that low cost. And then through your billable hours be able to bill back if there's any insurance that these families are covered under.

The other piece I wanted to point out too, is that the -- the guard -- I know in Avon, and I think in Newtown too, they are certified in search and rescue. And they did that with the horses and the troopers at their own cost. That was not of a cost to the state. So, I

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think you're talking about groups of people that are generally interested in making a positive difference.

And since we have two horse guards currently, as part of the State of Connecticut, I think we should during your -- your pilot, or your task force, bring them into this discussion. Thank you.

KATE NICOLL: Thank you.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Did you want to comment? Or
--

KATE NICOLL: No, thank you.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Thank you, Representative Hoydick.

Any other questions from the Committee?

Okay. Well I thank you very much for your testimony.

Next we have Sheryl Sprague. After Sheryl will be David McGuire.

SHERYL SPRAGUE: Good morning, Chairman Bartolomeo, Chairwoman Urban and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify you -- testify before you today in support of Senate Bill 654, An Act Creating Mental Health First Aid for Parents. I'm Sheryl Sprague, Prevention Manager at Rushford Center, a Hartford Healthcare Affiliate with locations in Meriden, Middletown, Glastonbury, Portland and Durham.

Rushford provides mental health and substance abuse treatment and recovery services to adolescents and adults in Connecticut and

Any other Committee members with questions?

Well, thank you very much. We appreciate your time in the hot seat.

DAVID MCGUIRE: Thank you very much.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Next we have Steve Hernandez and followed by Maria Buckley.

STEVE HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, ranking members and all the members of the committee. My name is Steve Hernandez, I'm the attorney for the Legislature's committee -- Commission of Children. I'm here to testify on four bills specifically for which -- upon which you've heard really interesting and compelling testimony.

Specifically the Senate Bill 328 on violent point and shoot video games, Senate Bill 654, mental health first aid programs for parents, House Bill 6330, look alike fire arms, and House Bill 6465, on animal therapy. Firstly on -- on the really dynamic question of violent point and shoot video games. We heard compelling testimony from Senator Harp this morning. So I want to buttress some of what she said.

And also perhaps some of what was discussed with the -- about the ACLU and the complexities there. The Commission supports the establishment of a violent video game task force within the Department of Children and Families to study the effects of violent video games on youth behavior. We're honored that you would have a designee from the Commission on the task was to express the voice of children and youth.

pediatricians in mental health, school social workers in a system of proven home visitation systems. And improved coordination between school and community programs in mental health are strategies that might offer more profound family connection.

Now we have -- I -- we did submit testimony on our -- on the animal therapy. And I just want to punctuate that in Newtown, the Commission was there the morning after. And we set up a play station where several animals, who came from as far away I think as the Midwest, spend time with children and provided a -- an alternative of a different species to provide comfort and to provide solace for children in the time when sometimes sharing with your own species is very, very difficult. So we fully support that program.

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SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Thank you.

STEVE HERNANDEZ: Sure.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Questions from Committee?

So, I have a question for you. Could -- you had mentioned and in your testimony it's written, there's an interesting analysis about the role of gaming and escapism or dissociation. Could you please provide us, for the record, with that information? And did you -- you in fact, I believe, said there is a causal connection. And so I'm curious about that.

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STEVE HERNANDEZ: Well what's interesting is that discussions about dissociative behavior and the -- and the access of video games is actually the opposite of a causal connection. What that would suggest is that while there is conflicting and sometimes nuance research on

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SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Thank you very much.

Do we have questions from Committee?

Sorry. Representative Vargas.

REP. VARGAS: I think that the testimony was pretty self explanatory. And I thank you.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: I couldn't tell if you were waving to me or not. I'm sorry.

Anyone else?

Okay. Well thank you. One of the benefits of going towards the end is that we don't have to ask you quite as many questions. So, thank you very much for your testimony. We do appreciate it.

DANIELA GIORDANO: Thank you very much for having me.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: We now have Lauren Crowley.

LAUREN CROWLEY: Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Children's Committee, good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you that an Act Concerning Animal Therapy. I am Lauren Crowley, a licensed clinical social worker at the Roosevelt Middle School, School Based Health Center in New Britain, sponsored by the Community Health Center.

On a volunteer basis, I work with my certified therapy dog, Cooper. He is a five year old black lab who loves people. We visit two settings, an assisted living facility and a children's mental health facility. When we go to visit the children's mental health facility, Cooper and the other dogs enjoy

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going through an agility obstacle course alongside the children.

The children love to pet, hug and walk the dogs around the gym. And the dogs simultaneously give the children unconditional love in return. Some of their comments on a survey about the visits are: the dogs make me feel better and happy. The dogs are a coping skill. The dogs make me smile. The dogs calm me down, help with my depression and a time to enjoy Cooper. The dogs help me have fun. The dogs cheer me up. Staff report that one dog helped a client talk who hadn't talked in three months at this facility.

Post Sandy Hook, Cooper and I visited a Winter Fest in Newtown to visit with the children and families there. We also visited Newtown children attending an after school program. Our visits provided these children and families a little distraction from the recent tragic event. They actually appeared to be having fun.

As most of us, I felt that I wanted to help the community of Newtown. I thought that Cooper could be a great way to bring some joy to the children and community who have suffered such a tragedy. Our visit did just that. Although I don't currently bring Cooper to work with me, I have quite a few pictures of him on my desk. My school based clients often ask -- often ask me about him and tell me about the dogs in their families.

It has been a great way to develop rapport and share feelings around something familiar. Research has been shown that dogs help with rapport building between a client and a therapist. Especially in the beginning of their work together.

Please consider passing House Bill 6465.
Therapy dogs can do so much to help children
who are dealing with stressors and trauma.
Having a furry friend and seeing a wagging
tail by their side does a great deal to ease
some of the emotional issues and help begin
work during therapy. Dogs love
unconditionally, are nonjudgmental, are
empathic, and enjoy the company of children.
Thank you.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Thank you.

Do we have any questions from Committee?

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN: First of all, I can't thank you enough
for taking the time to come in and share with
us your volunteer status with your -- your
therapy dog.

LAUREN CROWLEY: Thank you.

REP. URBAN: And the -- the -- the comments that
you made that the children gave back to you
are the ones that we hear all the time. It's
serious, as I've said already today, there's
just this natural affinity between children
and dogs. Can -- are you -- do you actually
use Cooper in therapy sessions? Or do you do
therapy dog visits?

LAUREN CROWLEY: I do therapy dogs on a volunteer
basis. Currently, my agency doesn't have an
animal assisted therapy program. But that's
something that I'm looking into for the
future.

REP. URBAN: And I love that idea because I -- I
totally love our school based health centers.

LAUREN CROWLEY: Thank you.

REP. URBAN: Clearly they're -- the evidence is in that that's what we need to do. And certainly post Sandy Hook, the more that we have school based health centers. And if we can get animal therapy into those where -- again, we're always talking about the -- the children feeling that there's a stigma attached to being depressed, or being bullied, or whatever it is. That an animal can get in -- into a child's heart and head.

Sometimes it can be facilitated so that the therapist can actually work with them. So, if you are -- if you are going down that path, we'd love to know about it.

LAUREN CROWLEY: Okay.

REP. URBAN: So, that we can -- because the more we know about that -- and -- and if you have an active plan or --

LAUREN CROWLEY: The challenge that I think a lot of my -- myself and others run into is the liability insurance. I know when I'm working with Cooper on a volunteer basis, he has insurance. But when -- if he was using me as I'm working -- excuse me. He doesn't have coverage. I have coverage as a social worker. But he doesn't have coverage. So that's a road block I'm encountering.

REP. URBAN: Now that would be coverage in case a child falls over him and hurts himself? Or that he suddenly decides he's going to bite somebody?

LAUREN CROWLEY: Right.

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REP. URBAN: Or -- yes. Which is really absurd.
But we --

LAUREN CROWLEY: I know. I don't think that he's
-- but --

REP. URBAN: No, I get it.

LAUREN CROWLEY: -- currently as an administrator,
I would want to make sure that the dog had
liability coverage as well.

REP. URBAN: Well I would -- we're not going to ask
you this question. For the record, but we're
going to ask it of our legislative research.

LAUREN CROWLEY: Okay.

REP. URBAN: If we can find out what the liability
issues are on this? I think Kate's over
there. That would be my question for the
record today. I want to know what the
liability issues are? And how much liability
insurance does cost? That's an excellent
point. And I certainly appreciate your
bringing it up.

And again, thank you so much. And please give
our best to Cooper.

LAUREN CROWLEY: I will. And I have to say after
Sandy Hook, even though I'm in New Britain
which is removed from Sandy Hook, it was just
-- it wasn't a great place for kids. I know
myself, a nurse practitioner, we checked in
with each kid to see how he or she was doing
-- you know -- watching the news. And middle
schools they know what's going on. They have
phones. And they watch TV.

So, it was certainly heartwarming and -- to
talk to them and just check with them to make

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sure they feel safe. And hear their comments.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Thank you.

Any other questions, comments?

Thank you very much.

LAUREN CROWLEY: Thank you for your time.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: The last person I have signed up on the list is Kathy Queen. Kathy here? Okay. Is there anyone else here who has not yet signed up but would like to testify? Going once. Yes, please. You may. Thank you.

If you could just state your name for the record? And if you're associated with any particular organization?

SANDY LOCK: My name is Sandy Lock. And I am President of Tails of Joy which is a volunteer pet partner therapy program. Our organization is based in Manchester, though our membership extends to Stonington out to Simsbury, Avon area and further. I'm here today to speak about House Bill 6465. And though I appreciate how it's come about and what I think it intends to accomplish.

I'm here to speak against it. And the reason for that is quite simply that as someone who oversees an organization of volunteers, we have some 70 members who are currently actively engaged in providing their volunteer services at nursing homes, hospitals, cancer centers, schools, libraries, cancer centers, hospice centers. And they do that after obtaining registration. After going through training, being evaluated, and it being determined that they're appropriate for

visiting in those environments.

After the tragic events of December 14th, many of these members were interested in down to Sandy Hook and offering their services with their dogs. What became immediate -- immediately apparent, as president of the organization, is that what Connecticut lacks is a coordinated effort, a coordinated system for all of these various pet partner therapy organizations, and agencies, the professionals and the simple volunteers to coordinate their effort when there is an emergency.

The other thing that we lack are enough trained pet partner therapy teams trained in crisis response, emergency situations, such as Sandy Hook. Those are the two things that are needed. And those two things, I believe, can be accomplished without burdensome, and in my view, wholly unnecessary legislation.

I don't -- certainly you -- I've been here throughout this hearing. And I've heard the comments related to the budget -- the current budget situation in Connecticut. I am a retired state employee. I was with the state agency for 24 years. I'm well aware of what legislation can do to burden the state agency. However, this is legislation, I think, that you don't need to move forward. I think that what it seeks to do can be accomplished without it becoming approved.

Thank you.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Okay.

Questions?

Representative Urban.

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REP. URBAN: Thank you very much for your testimony.

SANDY LOCK: You're welcome.

REP. URBAN: And I -- we would appreciate the two points that you've made. And this would be a question for the record. If you could expand on those points and give us a sort of -- well I'm not asking for language. Because you don't want to see legislation. But I'd like to know how you would suggest that that network be put together? Who would run that network? Would it be run through a parent organization, an umbrella organization?

Because right now, it's not happening which you've already pointed out.

SANDY LOCK: Correct.

REP. URBAN: So, the idea and -- remember that this is proposed language at this point in time.

SANDY LOCK: Right.

REP. URBAN: We can put in -- we can JFS this bill with substitute language. It's been my experience in observing this that if we just leave it alone, it doesn't come together. And there are -- there are a lot of competing interest. And we're trying to say let's stop with the competing interest and let's do something where we have a crisis response team.

And then we also have some training within our Department of Children and Families to use animals in therapy with at risk kids. So, I would very much be interested in the suggestions that you have for making this happen without actually putting it in statute?

SANDY LOCK: Okay. And I can certainly appreciate that. And I am well aware of the competing interests in this matter. Those became more and more apparent as time went by after December 14th. Networking is an asset that organizations, individual organizations in this state have put to use in other means. And I -- I think one of the most I'm familiar with is childcare.

There are various associations throughout the state and then together they form a state wide network. There is no good reason -- and I have had conversations with one of your previous speakers, and in fact was a bit -- based on our conversations surprised by this legislation, or this proposed legislation. It was brought to my attention yesterday by another professional in the state.

This proposed legislation was not mentioned in conversations that we have had about networking. And quite honestly, not on behalf of Tails of Joy, but personally, by concern is those competing parties have -- have obtained -- obtained this committee's endorsement of some legislation that is not necessary. We have had conversations. We are together -- we are putting together a meeting of individuals from different organizations.

And there is no good reason that we can't set up a state wide network.

REP. URBAN: With all due respect, when you say that that organizations got this committee's attention. Well they got this committee's attention because they came to this committee and discussed it with us after -- not just after Sandy Hook. I've been pushing for this for probably six years.

SANDY LOCK: Right.

REP. URBAN: So, apparently you haven't been privy to the fact that I've been pushing for this. Therefore, it appears to me that the network is not working. And that's why I'm asking for the record that you give us an outline of how you would make this work without having anything in statute. Thank you.

SANDY LOCK: You're welcome. And I'd like the opportunity to present that to you if I could.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Okay. That would be a question for the record, please.

I also have a question. So, we heard in the very, very beginning from someone from a group called Soul Friends.

SANDY LOCK: Yes.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: And they stated in their testimony that they're the state's only trained crisis response animal team. They also stated though that in the situation of Sandy Hook, we had out of state organizations coming in and then it was two weeks after the event before they were able to participate, even though they had made themselves available in the beginning.

So, I guess, I'm wondering if you can -- if you can speak to how that might have happened? Because if I'm listening to you, you are saying that we don't need legislation because there's already this networking or a network -- and that this isn't needed. But to me that would sound as though we're going outside of the state. So something is needed.

Could you speak to that in your opinion?

SANDY LOCK: Absolutely. If I've been unclear, I apologize. I have not said that we have the networking. I've said that the solution to this situation is in networking. It lies within networking, not within legislation. And the tools are the associations. You -- Connecticut has multiple organizations who provide volunteer pet partner therapy services.

Those organizations were struggling to find ways to go into Sandy Hook without simply getting in their cars with their dogs and driving down there. We encouraged our members not to do that. We felt that the Sandy Hook community was overwhelmed with the folks who were coming. I can tell you that personally, I responded to emails from all over the country of people who just wanted to come to Connecticut.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: So how long has your organization, and or others that you're familiar with, how long have you been in existence?

SANDY LOCK: We've been in existence since 1998. We're based in Manchester.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Okay. So then how would we -- I guess similar to what Diana was asking, how we would then expect that it's now going to happen without legislation? If -- if the organizations and associations have been around that long, and they haven't formalized in some way shape or form, so that they were able to say -- you know -- we are -- we're a unified alliance, if you will. And here we are to present our skilled workers to help in this situation.

Because -- you know -- I guess we really do try as much as possible. You know -- Connecticut -- grown in Connecticut may stay -- you know -- that kind of thing. And so when we're in a situation where our state was in it's -- you know -- in the mist of this horrible tragedy, we did have to go out of state. But, so -- I guess I'm not seeing how -- are you just saying that now because we've maybe -- because we brought forward this legislation. And because it -- now everyone is going to jump to action and formalize?

SANDY LOCK: I -- without -- without going into details, I -- the legislation --

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: I'll -- I'll allow you to go into the details if you want. Because we're all sitting here struggling with that same question.

SANDY LOCK: -- kind of -- and I understand. Conversation -- and my -- the testimony I was going to present was going to be a little bit different. I decided to stay and hear out what folks presented before speaking. And so I apologize if I seem a little bit unfinished in my comments.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: No need to apologize. We'll just try to work without.

SANDY LOCK: The networking has begun. The organizations, like Soul Friends, like Warm Hearts Cold Noses, like Tails of Joy, have been working to set up a mutual date where we could meet, and talk and discuss a coordinated response. That meeting has to occur. Yes, it has not occurred yet.

Individuals from those conversations have

sought instead to work on this legislation. What the purpose of that is, I'm not sure. And why it was not shared with the individuals who are attempting to come up with a meeting of the minds. I'm not sure. And I'm not going to name names or get into the details of that. But I think that it is absolutely possible if folks would simply put a plain face on it that says what we need to do here is to network.

So, that when there is a tragedy in the state, there is -- there is a means. There's a place where the town mayor, the school superintendent know to go to get the assistance of the pet therapy teams who already exist within the state. We -- all of our teams are registered by one of several organizations, either the Pet Partners National Organization or International, the Intermountain Therapy Organization.

Those are all resources for us. And can be used in a situation like this.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Thank you. And -- you know -- I guess -- I guess what I would say to you is that I understand the situation that you're describing. I think that since -- it's been since 1988, I guess I personally do commend those who have come forward and asked for this. And -- you know -- it is and just a note here -- it is written in the language of this bill. It says animal assisted therapy including but not limited to Connecticut Humane Society, Soul Friends Incorporated animal assistance therapy services.

So, I think for those in your industry, if you will, who might want to participate and do that networking. Nobody is being boxed out by this legislation. But I do think that quite

frankly it seems that it's taken this to get to the point that we need some legislation to be ready, to be organized, to respond to those in need in our state. Especially because this is very strongly connected with mental health wellness, if you will.

So -- you know -- I do appreciate the situation you're in right now. But I think in some way it's -- the time has come. The time has gone. And we are now acting. So, but it doesn't mean that Tails of Joy wouldn't be able to participate in way moving forward.

Any other questions from members?

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN: Just as -- as far as legislative process that you understand it. This is the proposed language.

SANDY LOCK: Yes.

REP. URBAN: We can add any organization that requests to be a part of this. Which is exactly what we're looking for. So that we have a comprehensive inclusive group. And that's -- that's exactly what we want. We want to be as inclusive as -- as we possibly can. Or we can eliminate that language and make it a general.

So -- you know -- this is not in stone. This is proposed language. This is the public hearing for the proposed language. We take the public comment and then we meet together and decide what we need to do with that particular language. So, we're looking for input from you and whomever it is that you're working with. We would love to hear from you. So thank you for your testimony.

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11:00 A.M.

SANDY LOCK: Thank you.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Any other members with
questions or comments?

Thank you very much.

SANDY LOCK: You're welcome.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO: Anyone else from the public
who is here that would like to speak who has
not signed up?

Anyone else like to speak?

Well then I will call this public hearing to a
close. We are adjourned.



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



**Testimony of Steven Hernández
Director of Public Policy and Research
Connecticut Commission on Children**

**Children Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Tuesday, February 26, 2013**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and Honorable Members of the Children Committee,

My name is Steven Hernández, and I am the Attorney for the Legislature's Commission on Children.

I am here this morning to provide the Commission's testimony

- S.B. 328; An Act Concerning Minors And Violent Point-And-Shoot Video Games;
- S.B. 654; An Act Creating A Mental Health First Aid Program For Parents;
- H.B. 6330; An Act Concerning Look-A-Like Firearms; and
- H.B. 6465; An Act Concerning Animal Therapy.

S.B. 328; An Act Concerning Minors And Violent Point-And-Shoot Video Games

The Commission supports the establishment of a Violent Video Game Task Force within the Department of Children and Families to study the effects of violent video games on youth behavior.

We are honored that you would have a designee by the Commission on the Task Force to express the voice of children and youth.

There is a robust debate reoccurring in this country after the facts of Newtown emerged about the effects of violent video games on children, particularly violent first-person shooter games.

We do know that children are spending increasing amounts of time playing these games: boys averaging 13 hours a week; girls five hours.

There have been interesting analyses about the role of gaming in escapism or dissociation. At the same time, soldiers returning from the fields of war are accessing therapies that include first-

person scenarios to replay, and hopefully repair, through the experience of war from a safe distance.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that while there are instances of normal dissociation, which do not interfere with the child's development and social and academic progress, there are types of problematic dissociation, which "can occur when a child has to cope with an overwhelming or frightening event, with multiple frightening events, or with a confusing living situation."

In those cases, violent video games could provide a type of escapism which may keep the child from developing normally and forming healthy attachments.

The Commission looks forward to exploring these important issues further.

H.B. 6465; An Act Concerning Animal Therapy.

The Commission supports HB6465. The Commission worked in Newtown from the early morning after the shooting until the town had created its infrastructure for support and healing. We built, with our national partner Save the Children, a play and art station in John Reed Middle School. Therapy dogs were on our team every day.

The play station was a partnership between community mental health, family strengthening and disaster management. It became the transition room where some children lingered before seeing a counselor. Others stayed while their parents sought crisis help. Games were invented. Group discussion emerged on death, mourning, and how to recover. Over 400 children and their parents found solace and support at the play station.

At all times, one or two well-trained therapy dogs sat with the children. They knew to patiently let children play, touch, hold, and hang on to them. For some, particularly the children who had difficulty using their words, the dogs were the species the student's needed to reach out. In truth, some children needed to rest against a species other than humans, after what they had witnessed.

Children heard their principal die. Some witnessed their friends and teachers die. Others walked past those who did not survive themselves. Many hid, not knowing what would come.

Our team included teachers and first responder, and therapy dogs were a part of that team. They were a constant source of care, comfort and innocence. The dogs welcomed the children and sat with them. Their touch and sensitivity made what was almost unbearable, bearable.

Some dogs did tricks, others pawed for your hand. Some talked; others turned on their backs and asked to be touched by those who had gone so deep inside it seemed they might not return.

Well trained therapy dogs and other animals follow a culture of work, spirit and nurturance. They bring what, at times, humans cannot, while partnering with a human team. When children talked about the devil taking over the town, the dogs did tricks, turned in circles, asked for hugs and brought light and love back to the forefront.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Public Hearing Testimony

Children Committee

February 26, 2013



S.B. No. 654 AN ACT CREATING A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID PROGRAM FOR PARENTS

The Department of Children and Families offers the following comments regarding S.B. No. 654, An Act Creating a Mental Health First Aid Program for Parents. This bill would establish a mental health first aid program for parents so that parents will be better equipped to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness in their children and the community in general.

While we can appreciate the goals of this legislation and believe that we can provide some online and limited training resources, we believe that there may be a cost associated with all aspects of this legislation that is not currently in the DCF budget.

H.B. No. 6465 AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL THERAPY

The Department of Children and Families offers the following comments regarding H.B. No. 6465, An Act Concerning Animal Therapy.

DCF supports the concept of expanding the use of animal assisted therapy in many areas of our work. We witnessed first-hand how effective the bond between children and animals can be during the recent Newtown tragedy. Dogs were brought in from across the country, providing a needed sense of comfort to many of those directly impacted by the events of December 14th. We also believe that animals may be of significant comfort to children when they are interviewed or have to testify in Court in sexual abuse cases.

In the current fiscal climate there may not be funds available to accomplish what this bill seeks however, we are willing to work with the proponents of this legislation to seek private funds to accomplish many of the worthy goals of this bill.

Although I don't currently bring Cooper to work with me, I have quite a few pictures of him on my desk. My school based clients often ask me about him and then tell me about the dogs in their family. It has been a great way to develop rapport and share feelings around something familiar. Research has been shown that dogs help with rapport building between a client and a therapist, especially in the beginning of their work together.

Please consider passing H.B. 6465. Therapy dogs can do so much to help children who are dealing with stressors and trauma. Having a furry friend and seeing a wagging tail by their side does a great deal to ease some of the emotional issues and help begin work during therapy. They love unconditionally, are nonjudgmental, are empathic, and enjoy the company of children!

Legislative Testimony

In Support of Bill #6465 – An Act Concerning Animal Assisted Therapy

Respectfully submitted by Kate Nicoll, LCSW, Founder: Soul Friends . AAT Programs of Connecticut

Sandy Hook taught us that animal assisted therapy works. The benefits of the human-animal bond can comfort children and families and first responders at the time of an unthinkable tragedy. Animals simply know what to do then when we are feeling powerless and overwhelmed.

Within a few hours of the Sandy Hook tragedy, Soul Friends staff contacted 211 to alert them to our state's only trained crisis response animal therapy team. We were thankful for the support from out of state teams, but Connecticut's own crisis response team only responded to the needs of Newtown two weeks after the event. In state we had listing of hundreds of teams willing to volunteer their time – some who responded had only a few months of volunteer training. Hundreds of the teams had a complex rating, recognized by the Delta Society Pet Partners program, a national registry of animal assisted therapy teams. Attempts to organize visitation for volunteers first for those with the complex rating never came to fruition. Many wonderful people were on the ground volunteering with their therapy animals and did good things for those in need. For future events it would be most beneficial to have a volunteer crisis response therapy dog teams as part of the own state's first responder team.

How does animal assisted therapy work? Who does it help? And How? And How well are our teams trained? These are the questions of results based accountability – and our in state resources in animal assisted therapy have the answers. There are more than 6 in-state agencies providing animal assisted therapy and activities with our state's children. At Soul Friends, we have had a team of 8 mental health clinicians providing animal assisted therapy for almost ten years serving over 5,700 children, at least 50% under the care of the Department of Children and Families. These are often the children who have not responded to traditional mental health therapy, but with the help of canine assisted or equine assisted therapy partner, the children share their innermost thoughts like: "Bear loves me, so I must be a good boy" from a boy with multiple foster care placements. "I'm a better canine friend than a human friend" from a teen living with Asperger's. "Ned calms me down" from the teenage girl with a history of explosiveness.

It is time for Connecticut to recognize its' own expertise in the human-animal bond and its ability to heal our children. We have been ahead of the curve in practice. Five years ago, Soul Friends staff contacted the DCF review board to explore a treatment modality that could utilize AAT for children who witnessed or perpetrated animal abuse – the study was rejected for concern there wasn't enough numbers of children. The Department of Children and Families needs more training in the human-animal bond – we could have been a leader here in the careful integration of AAT for children who abuse animal as a way to improve empathy. A recent study in Spain explored the positive impact of a dog's eye contact for children living with autism. At Soul Friends, eight years ago we presented at an International Conference on Autism on how interaction with a therapy dog increased both eye contact

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for children with special needs, as well as demonstrated an increased sense of body awareness for children during social interactions. A recent study from the American Humane Association, is exploring the effectiveness of canine assisted therapy for children living with cancer. Ten years, Soul Friends staff contacted a Pediatric Oncologist at large teaching hospital to explore the impact of therapy dog visitation on the blood pressure readings of children living with cancer – At the first regional New England Animal Assisted Therapy Resource group at Boston Children's Hospital, two of the presenters on the cutting edge of the field were from Connecticut. One clinician was ahead of the field in the development of policies in how to integrate animals into clinical work, one clinician ahead of the field in the gathering outcome measures.

The point is animal assisted therapy produces positive outcomes for children in need – and our state has many of our own experts in the field of human-animal studies, as well as hundreds of volunteer therapy animal teams ready to work to support, and to provide comfort to our own children. I strongly support the components of the bill that requests for the Department of Children and Families, the Governor's Partnership on Prevention and the Department of Agriculture – to recognize and gain support from our in state experts in the field and as our mission at Soul Friends states "to heal the hearts of children one wagging tail at a time".

Handwritten signature and notes:
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**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2013**

**VOL.56
PART 10
3086 - 3445**

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If all the members have voted please check the board to determine if your vote has been properly cast and if so the machine will be locked. And the Clerk will take a tally. And will the Clerk please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

Bill number 6634.

Total Number Voting 150

Necessary for Adoption 76

Those voting aye 97

Those voting nay 42

Absent and not voting 11

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The bill passes.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar number 71.

THE CLERK:

On page 39, Calendar number 71, House Bill 6465, favorable report of the joint standing Committee on Human Services, AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL THERAPY.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Diana Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of

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the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The question is acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill. Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Clerk has in his possession an amendment, LCO number 5971. I ask that he call it and I be allowed to summarize.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Will the Clerk please call Calendar number 5971 which will be designated as House A.

THE CLERK:

House A, LCO 5971 introduced by Representative Urban et al.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The Representative seeks leave of the Chamber to summarize. Is there objection? Objection? Seeing none, Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, this is a strike all amendment so it does in fact become the bill. Madam Chair, we had a very, very unfortunate

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and tragic incident in the State of Connecticut several months ago and I think it all weighs very heavily on our minds and of course I'm referring to Sandy Hook and Newtown but there was a glimmer of light in that terrible tragedy and that was a wonderful, wonderful group of animal therapy dogs that were brought in from out of state to comfort the families and to comfort the siblings of the victims.

Madam Chair, what happened when these dogs came in from out of state although it was wonderful that they were there to comfort it in essence eliminated our own therapy dogs and crisis response teams from Connecticut to have the opportunity to be there. And this was an issue because at a point in time these dogs had to return to their respective states, in some cases it was Ohio, and a relationship had been formed with the family and the therapy animal and there the animal has to leave. So that was the genesis of this bill.

Knowing that we do have teams in Connecticut. We have Soul Friends. We have Pet Partners. We have Tails of Joy. And we have other animal assisted therapy services. And Madam Chair, before I continue with this it's appropriate for me to thank my Ranking

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Member, Representative Widlitz and my former Ranking Member, Representative Terry Woods because they were very instrumental in making this bill what it is today. They pointed out that why doesn't this just happen.

If we have all these wonderful animal therapy teams why can't it just happen? Why do we need to step in to make it happen? And when we examined that we found that since 1988 these teams had not gotten together. We asked them to come in. I move adoption.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The question before the Chamber is on adoption. Will you care to remark further, Representative Urban?

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And where I was was bringing these teams together and in a wonderful outcome these teams have formed their own organization, Connecticut Animal Assisted Crisis Response Team. They now have a website and they are now meeting. So the only job that we had left was how do we deploy these teams when there is a crisis that -- that would benefit from having these animal therapy crisis teams.

And it seemed logical to talk to our Department

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of Children and Families because they're the ones that deploy our counselors to these same places.

And yet again the Department of Children and Families stepped up and I would sort of repeat what Representative Jutila said, we -- within no extra cost to the State of Connecticut they are willing to coordinate this so that when there is a crisis one of the regional teams will be -- be deployed with one of the DCF teams. And I urge support.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, Madam.

Will you care to remark further on House Amendment Schedule A? Representative Betts of the 78th.

REP. BETTS (78th):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And I -- I thank the Chair for her kind comments about our efforts to try and reach a consensus here for this very worthwhile bill. But I'd like to, through you, Madam Chair, ask several questions of the proponent of the bill. And I'd like to start off by simply saying why is it necessary to have this bill, this program put into statute? Could we not do this program without making it a law? Through you, Madam Speaker.

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DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

This is still an amendment.

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you, Madam Speaker. And I thank my good Ranking Member for the question. In -- the opportunity for us as the State of Connecticut to espouse this and give it the importance that we think it deserves and I think there were some magical stories about some of these therapy animals. And then to have the overriding agency to trigger and deploy the teams along with their counselors it made sense to give it that structure under statute. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER URBAN:

Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78th):

Thank you. And thank you for that answer. Madam Speaker, as I understand it this amendment is going to become -- Madam Speaker, as I understand it this bill is going to become the -- this amendment is going to become the bill. Would you like me to refrain from asking questions until it's been adopted or should I ask them now?

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DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Well we could adopt the amendment.

REP. BETTS (78th):

Okay. I'll -- I'll hold my questions until we vote on the amendment. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Okay. Let me try your minds. All those in favor of Senate -- House Amendment A please signify by saying aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

All those opposed, nay. The ayes have it. The amendment is adopted. Will you care to remark further now on the bill as amended?

REP. BETTS (78th):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In -- in this bill if you take a look at subsection B -- I mean I beg your pardon, under section one subsection B it says that the Commissioner of Children and Families shall within available appropriations develop and implement training for certain employees.

I'd like to ask the Chair how much money we're talking about because it does say within available

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appropriations so obviously some money is involved here. How many employees we're talking about and what type of training is necessary for this program?

Through you, Madam Chair.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Chair. Because of your input, Representative Widlitz, we have gotten no fiscal note in the discussions with DCF and it's -- it's because DCF has collaborated with Soul Friends already and so they have an ongoing relationship and so just expanding a little bit of that is not going to be a problem for that.

And I would also let you know that they do some therapeutic riding and they also have trained around the therapeutic riding so they don't see this as an extra expense they just see it as doing -- and I'm going to go back to Representative Jutila again, that you know as we would hope that when we're asking them to step up they do step up. Through you, Madam Chair.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78th):

Yes. Thank you very much and thank you for that answer but when I hear the word expansion it suggests to me that there's going to be more involved and some money will -- some money will be involved and I would certainly support that but during the process and DCF itself even agreed with this, we felt that the first option that should be exercised to meet any financial needs for this worthwhile program was to come from the private sector whether it be by foundations or individuals.

And actually I remember everybody on the committee agreed that they thought that that was a much better way of raising the money for these programs especially given the fiscal limitations we have with our State budget. So I am very concerned that any State money be devoted to this whether it's within appropriations or not because my recollection was we were going to try and keep the State out of formalizing this program and taking a major role. It really belongs in the private sector.

What I would like to ask is in this bill it says of DCF a mental health specialist, they're going to learn about the healing value of human animal bond for children, the value of therapy animals in dealing with

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traumatic situations and the benefit of an animal assisted therapy program. With all due respect I would think that that would be particularly self-evident especially after what happened with Newtown. So I'm not quite sure I understand why there is a need to have a training program to educate people on something that is very self-evident and for which we've seen numerous recent benefits to this type of program. So what is the need for having this training as written in the bill? Through you, Madam -- Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you. To go back to one of the questions that the good Representative asked before, we -- the -- this is all volunteer on the part of Pet Partners and Tails of Joy, et cetera, so we are in fact partnering with the private sector because it's volunteers from these organizations that are doing this.

As far as the training, it's very interesting but within five years ago people did not understand the importance of the human animal bond in trauma and what

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it's called is considering the importance of the human animal bond for children with trauma stories of hope. And it's basically familiar -- familiarizing them with how you respond to children.

There's an appropriate way to respond and there's a -- an inappropriate way and this is to assure that everybody is on the same page when you are actually talking to the children and you know the age of the child and how the child can be approached. And I guess -- I guess through you, Madam Speaker, it's -- it was just not accepted within like five to six years ago that this bond was so important.

So this actual training and -- and that's the name of it, really familiarizes people that might not be familiar with it. I oftentimes find people when I say that animal cruelty is a red flag for future violence who go wow I never thought of that. So I think that in this instance we want to be sure that each and every person that is associated when these teams are deployed understand how you deal with it. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78th):

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Thank you for that answer. Are there any other states that have this program in law? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

That is a very interesting question because I would tell you that there's a national organization called Hope Animal Assistance Crisis Response and they actually started in 1998 when Kip Kinkel put firecrackers in kittens mouths before he killed his parents, killed two people and injured 12 at Thurston High School.

So the organization started in Oregon. It's -- there are six regions and they're -- it has been as I said a response since 1998 and I could look up the six regions, through you -- through you, Madam Speaker, but it would mean I'd have to take a second to find them. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78th):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And that's really not necessary but I think what is really

perplexing to me especially as a person who has four dogs and is known to be a lover of animals, I have a very difficult time understanding the need for putting this into statute. It is beyond debate whether it was five years ago -- five years ago or not. It is beyond debate about the value of animal therapy and it's not limited to just traumatic and emotional situations. They also have it in nursing homes and hospitals as well.

But to be trained in terms of understanding the value and -- and benefit of animal therapy completely baffles me because I think people don't need to be trained in the obvious. I mean I think there are a lot of people who know, who've seen and clearly see the benefit of doing it. And furthermore I've been of the belief that we pass too many laws no matter how well intended that could be done in the private sector.

This is not something that strikes me as if it's a primary mission of the State government. It is something that we should be doing in collaboration but we don't need to put everything into statute to be able to accomplish. So for those reasons, Madam Chair, and plus the fact that they're going to talk

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about needing money which I personally think they will need and which I think they can get from the private sector and if I were wrong about getting it from the private sector then they can come back to the State government to ask and request the money.

But given that very logical expectation of needing money I think it is a huge mistake in this environment to go first to the State and ask for money to implement a program and train employees on something that just defies my understanding. And I have to -- I have to oppose this as I did in the -- in the committee. If people really believe that this is something that needs to be put in statute well by all means vote for this but I think if you were to talk to people back in your communities and they said okay what did you do today?

Well we put into law a statute that promotes and talks about the benefits of training State employees regarding the program of animal therapy I think they would really be scratching their heads. I mean we have an awful lot of things that are pressuring our budget and this is something where we can do without getting the State government involved. And for those reasons, Madam Chair, I will be opposing this.

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And I thank the good Chairlady for her support and trying to bring the parties together which had not gotten together for the better part of 20 years or maybe 25 years. And I think the idea that she was able to bring those together will certainly facilitate better cooperation but I think that just also reinforces this -- reinforces the reason why we don't need this as a law. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, Sir. Will you care to remark further? Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. A few questions if I can for the proponent.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Please proceed.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Some of the questions have been answered by my colleague, Representative Betts in terms of the -- the first question. I'm not sure if it's adequately been answered so I'll ask it again is you know why are we putting this type of legislation into laws as a mandate to the State of Connecticut to go ahead and do

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this.

So through you, Madam Speaker, why are we doing this?

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you. If I can -- if I can just repeat, when Sandy Hook happened we had out of state teams arrive which crowded out our own teams. Our own teams were crowded out because of a lack of someone to deploy them and organize them and have them be in conjunction with our own counselors. That is where the genesis of this bill came from. So then in talking to the teams that were crowded out and in sitting with them they formed their own organization. They have a website.

But we do need a method of deploying as well as being sure that when the DCF counselors are there, they're aware of the teams that are there so that they can work together. And what happened with Sandy Hook was when the dogs left the children and the families were left with a void. When we have our own teams from the State of Connecticut those teams are still available to see these children and see these families

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and I would emphasize yet again it is all volunteers from the private sector.

Department of Children and Families has assured us because they already are doing this training through Soul Friends and through the therapeutic riding that there is no additional cost to the taxpayer of the State of Connecticut for these volunteers to articulate with the counselors at DCF and for everyone to be familiar with the terminology and the appropriateness of approaching children through either the counselor, the counselor with the animal, or the therapeutic person with the animal. Through you, Madam Chair -- Speaker. Sorry.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And for the record I just want to make it clear that I understand the need and the benefit of what we're talking about here but what I still don't understand and I heard the good Representative's answer is why we're making this legislation.

Why is not a nonprofit corporation providing this same benefits to these children who are in need

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because of an emotional trauma or whatever it may be?
Why is it that we cannot set up a private, nonprofit corporation to assist these children in the same manner because looking at the language of this bill I do not see how it will help alleviate the issues that have been described so far by the good Representative.

So I'm not sure if I'm missing something in the language of the bill, perhaps it could be shown to be, Madam Speaker, where in the bill would the problem be solved that occurred in Sandy Hook? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure that it's appropriate to point out certain lines because it is the bill as a whole that recognizes that Department of Children and Families would be the appropriate agency to deploy the animal therapy teams along with their counselors. When there is a crisis the -- the first one informed is our Department of Children and Families to get counselors immediately to the school, to the wherever it happens to be that we've had that crisis.

So if it's deemed appropriate that there should be an animal therapy team with them then the DCF Commissioner, Joette Katz, would be deploying the animal team along with the human team to the tragedy. So the underlying reason is that if you had the private sector exactly what happened in Sandy Hook would happen again because there is no overriding authority and the State in this case is the overriding authority to establish deployment of the teams to the crisis. Through you, Madam Chair -- Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I certainly now understand the intent behind the bill and the purpose behind the bill. I see no language in the bill that would accomplish that goal. There is simply no written words in this bill that would give the State jurisdiction over or a priority over any other entity that may want to assist in these very well meaning services of providing help and need to children.

I understand the goal. I understand the purpose. But the language here, Madam Speaker, does not give the State that jurisdiction. It just simply creates a

team. Creating a team will not alleviate the chaos perhaps that was described by the good Representative in terms of what may have happened at Sandy Hook. And I know it's -- you know it's probably too late unless they wanted to call the bill for now and work on it but if that's the goal, the goal is not going to be accomplished by this language of this bill.

So I think it probably should be called at this point to work on the language to give the State priority but it doesn't do that here, Madam Speaker. I just have a few other questions about some technical changes or language in the bill.

Looking at line 14 it talks about to develop and implement training for certain employees of the Department of Children and Families and mental healthcare providers. And my question through you, Madam Speaker, is who would those certain employees be?

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. That would be determined by the Department of Children and Families. And I would tell the good Representative that lines 23

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through 27 do talk about teams shall operate on a volunteer basis, shall be available to provide animal assisted therapy within 24 hours of receiving notice to do so and it's the Department of Children and Families who is tasked with giving that notice.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And thank you for that answer. You know that was going to be one of my next questions because it's really a contradiction in terms the language of the bill.

We talk about a mandate in the word shall yet the very next sentence said volunteer. So shall volunteer, I don't know those two -- I mean if I volunteer it's kind of like I do it when I want to do it and this is -- I'm happy to help but if you tell me I have to be there that's not a volunteer. So I -- looking at lines 24 to 27 again the language of the bill is contradictory in and of itself.

And we'll look at line 25, such teams shall operate on a volunteer basis; sounds good, and shall be available to provide animal assisted therapy within

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24 hours of receiving notice to do so. I'm a chosen volunteer. I've agreed to do this except I cannot be available within 24 hours. What happens in that scenario? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

(DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY IN THE CHAIR.)

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Thank you. Through you, Mr. Speaker. We have -- we have a number of animal therapy teams that are available and the -- they are all volunteers and that is the reason why we have a number who have chosen to participate in this because in case there is an incident where one team cannot respond, there is another team that can respond. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the situation rose -- and this is kind of the genesis of my question, where the volunteers were not available even though they're

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required under this statute to be available, is there any consequence of liability to the volunteer?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you -- I'm sorry, through you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely not. This is all based on wonderful people who were involved in this type of animal therapy for a good deal of time and it is one of their core values and they feel very strongly about it so they are complete and total volunteers. There's absolutely no consequences if we cannot reach a team within 24 hours. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And thank you for that answer. And just shifting back to lines 14 where we previously talked about certain employees and your response was that was -- those employees would be chosen by the Department. If the good Representative knows is there a certain number of employees that would be trained or is again that discretionary with the Department? Through you,

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Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. There -- there are employees that are already trained but it would be through the discretion of the Commissioner to decide. And I -- I have to assume it would -- it is teams that are already trained in this kind of crisis response and those would be the ones that would -- would be trained but it's up to the Commissioner. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And the cost for this training is paid by who? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. It's -- it's within the structure of the Department of Children and Families. They do not see any additional costs because they are already doing this type of training

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and I would refer back yet again to Representative Jutila when we are doing a little more because we're asked to do a little more and we just do a little more. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And you know what, I think that's wonderful to hear and I would hope all the State employees step up to the plate and do a little bit more like the private sector's doing. I suspect that they are because of the times that we are living in. But sometimes when we do a little bit more while we're doing more some of the stuff that we otherwise would be doing gets left unattended to. And do you see that as a consequence here? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly hope not because I certainly hope that we don't have a myriad of crises that require what was required at Sandy Hook. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

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Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you. And looking through section C now it talks about a volunteer canine crisis response team and in lines 23 through 25 it talks attempts to identify who will be on that team but it just really - - there's some general language, such teams shall consist of various handlers and canines. I'm looking for assistance there, Mr. Speaker, if the good Representative can help me understand who the various handlers would be? Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. These are organizations such as Soul Friends, Pet Partners, Tails of Joy who have established themselves as teams and have gone through some of the training that Hope offers. It is an -- a -- it is basically in its infancy so there are not a lot of restrictions and registrations here.

It's really teams that have established themselves and have been doing this animal assisted crisis response. And as I said they made themselves

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known to us as we offered this bill and came together and formed an organization. So it would be through that organization. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you. And just lastly, Mr. Speaker, jump into section D. It talks about developing a crisis response program and I'm wondering what type of program that would be. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Oh, sorry. Through you, Mr. Speaker. We are going to leave that to the -- to the DCF Commissioner and the Governor's Prevention Partnership. We -- as -- in talking with all these organizations they were talking about the fact that there is a lack of program to respond to these kinds of things and that perhaps it would be a good idea to work together to do that so we thought it would be appropriate to put it into the Governor's Prevention Partnership, the Commissioner of Children and Families and the new organization that we have in Connecticut. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

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DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And just finally then the -- the good Representative has reiterated throughout her question and answer session that there is no cost to the State of Connecticut. And I'm assuming that the development of this program would also be at no cost to the State of Connecticut. Is that fair to say? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you. And just to summarize here. You know the bill has good intentions. We are concerned about the cost but it's been reiterated a number of times that there is no cost to the State so we'll take the good Representative at -- at her word. I think the underlying bill and purpose here to make this -- this new program, this new body to have a priority over others who would like to assist in traumatic and emotional situations to help our children, I don't

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think it serves the purpose because the language is missing. I think the bill probably should be held. I'm happy to work in resolving the language issue at any time with the good Representative.

I know it's on the floor now but I remain willing and able to help and offer those services but until the language is clear to really set forth the language that should be identified in here I cannot support the bill at this time. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, Sir.

Gentlewoman from the 55th, Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Good afternoon.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

The Chairwoman of the Children's Committee has very thoroughly laid out the bill and the premise of the bill and the -- the good reasons for the bill. And I looked at it very closely and I found three particular problems with it. You know I carefully looked at the sections and it says that within available appropriations the big one in part B talks

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about develop and implement training for the certain employees and mental health providers though it doesn't mention who they are. And they shall identify and coordinate a volunteer crisis response team and they shall develop a crisis response program and it goes on.

But what's interesting was in each of those sections it says and not later than January 1, 2014. But the bill goes into effect October 1, 2013. So Mr. Speaker, we're looking at a three month period of time between the time the law -- it becomes law and when all these things are supposed to happen. Mr. Speaker, it sounds like a very good thing to do but I think it's a very, very -- and too short of a time.

You know I concur with somewhat of the other speakers have said and that all of this laudable work is supposed to be done within available appropriations. Mr. Speaker, I don't think I need to remind this Chamber that this is an agency that has been under court order -- court order for many years just trying to do certain care and responsibilities of families and children in trauma much of which we try and fund of every year, much of which we find that we're not doing a good enough job and the court comes

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back and says we have to do more, we have to change our focus.

So as much as I like this, I think it's a laudable thing to do. I think there's not enough time to do it, there's not enough money but the third thing, Mr. Speaker, I think it's been categorized under the wrong agency. Mr. Speaker, we know that our first responders and those that usually stay through a lot of the traumatic situations are the Connecticut State Police.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that this is perhaps one of those programs where the Connecticut State Police have animals, they have teams that are very familiar with canines though therapy animals aren't always dogs. I understand that. But have an animal program already.

And Mr. Speaker, when I looked at this also one of the other things I thought about was post-traumatic stress disorder. That can be caused by perhaps a -- a whole family -- a family that has been flooded out of their house, a family that has been burglarized, a family that has been traumatized by rape or some other horrible, horrible crime that has committed -- been committed against the -- a family.

And perhaps it is also the elderly when crime is committed against the elderly perhaps a husband and wife situation but there are no children. I totally believe in the animal therapy program and understand its benefits and I have followed the scientific work behind it. But at this time, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry I'm not able to support this. I don't believe the money has been put in place for it.

I don't think the time is long enough for it to be able to happen. And Mr. Speaker, we haven't answered the question of who is liable for these animals once it is put under a State agency and these teams are put forward. Where is the State's liability? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, Madam.

Gentlewoman from the 112th, Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY (112th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, a few questions to the proponent --

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Proceed.

REP. HOVEY (112th):

-- of the legislation. Thank you. Through you,

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Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the good Gentlewoman what her source of information is about what occurred at Sandy Hook as far as support services and interventions on 12-14 and 12-15. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through -- through you, Mr. Speaker. My information was basically directed at the animal therapy teams and it was through testimony from our own Commissioner of Department of Children and Families, Joette Katz. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY (112th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And through you, Mr. Speaker, did the Gentlewoman ever consult with or ask advice of the representatives of the Newtown, Sandy Hook which is 106th, 112th, and the second district in the State of Connecticut? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

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Through you, Mr. Speaker, I am not privy to that information.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY (112th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And is the Gentlewoman aware of just how many animal therapy units there are in the State of Connecticut? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. I am aware of the ones that have stepped up and those -- I think I have enumerated but if the good Representative would like me to enumerate again it is Soul Friends, Pet Partners, Tails of Joy, Animal Assisted Therapy Services. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

REP. HOVEY (112th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And actually I do know the answer to that question that I asked. You know the first rule of asking a question is always to make sure you know what the answer is hopefully. There are ten units in the State of Connecticut of which the

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Gentlewoman spoke of four having stepped up.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I have a question with regards to the role because I was a part of the tragedy in Sandy Hook and so I know who had boots on the ground there. And I knew -- I know who all the hands were on deck. And what I would like to know is does the Gentlewoman know what role DPH would have with regards to dispensing or dispersing the animal therapy units to a crisis situation? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. After much deliberation with our -- the State Police, with emergency response it was deemed the most appropriate thing was to couple the deployment with the Department of Children and Families. So I -- no I am not familiar with using the Department of Public Health. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Hovey.

REP. HOVEY (112th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the

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Gentlewoman for her answers. Mr. Speaker, in the crisis, the tragedy of Sandy Hook the Department of Public Health was the clearing house for the services and as you know and the entire State and country knows there was an immediate call for all hands on deck. And the Department engaged with the Yale New Haven crisis intervention teams who immediately dispersed people to Sandy Hook and Newtown.

The team that came and is still presently involved to varying degrees from the therapy dogs group came from out of state but were so highly organized that they immediately came into Sandy Hook, they were funded through a -- actually they're a not for profit that's funded through a church organization and had dealt with multiple crises and so knew the 24-7 kind of time, attention and commitment that it was going to take to provide therapeutic services to the Sandy Hook community and they continue to be there and we are very grateful for them.

Sir, I have to look at this legislation and you know I will admit that I am a little sensitive about this issue but the use of the Sandy Hook tragedy to promote personal agendas I find very disturbing. Any group of therapeutic animals in this State -- we

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actually have had a gentleman who has volunteered who has Clydesdales that are going to be used for -- for equine therapy.

There has been no one who has been pushed out from any ability to participate if they are organized, if they are committed and if they are making a promise to provide a service and -- and to the best of their abilities and it is viewed by the community as being cohesive and supportive. So the framing of this issue so to speak in that teams came from out of state and pushed out Connecticut therapeutic animal teams I think is a misrepresentation of how that situation occurred.

I think what may be a better representation of it was that Connecticut was not organized. Its -- its therapeutic teams were not organized well enough to be able to come in and to be able to make the 24-7 commitment to the community that the community needed. And therefore if nothing else came out of this conversation and the committee of cognizance work the fact that the organizations have gotten some sort of umbrella organization is fabulous.

And I cheer them on and support them and will be supportive of them from the -- from this point

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forward. But to then have them come under a State umbrella I think is unnecessary. I think that you can look at the Sandy Hook tragedy and look at the therapeutic animals that are there, that are not for profits, that are privately funded and who have done a fabulous job and it furthers the perspective that government does not need to be involved in that particular element of this tragedy. Thank you, Sir.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, Madam.

Gentlewoman from the 141st, Representative Wood.

REP. WOOD (141st):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few questions to the proponent of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Proceed.

REP. WOOD (141st):

Or I guess the -- we're still working on the amendment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

No, we're working on the bill as amended.

REP. WOOD (141st):

Okay. We're -- thank you. Time speeds along in here.

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DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Oh I wish.

REP. WOOD (141st):

We're going to wave a magic wand. Okay. Has the Commissioner signed off on this as a project? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think I'd be telling tales out of school if I said she has totally signed off on it and it's something that's very close to her heart. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Wood.

REP. WOOD (141st):

Thank you. I can understand why it's close to her heart. I think it's close to many of our hearts and I think you made the point earlier when you were presenting this bill that the importance of animal therapy and the human bond certainly in healing and post-traumatic stress syndrome.

My concern and question going forward is is housing this under DCF the proper place for this. I -

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- I'm not sure it is. I think DCF is already stretched and I just am very concerned about their taking this over within available appropriations.

It's like filling a cup with water. At some point the water overflows and you don't have any more space. Is this a program -- through you, Mr. Speaker, to the proponent of the bill. Is this a program you feel that would benefit adults as well? Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Could you reframe your question --

REP. WOOD (141st):

Yes.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

-- in the form of a seeking of a fact as opposed to an opinion, Representative Wood?

REP. WOOD (141st):

Oh dear, yes. Is -- will there be adults -- at what age do you see this animal -- at what age do you see this animal therapy program going to? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. It's -- it's a great question, Representative Woods, because in the

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testimony one of the things that Commissioner Katz said was one of the first things she saw was an adult who was hugging a dog who had not been able to talk about the crisis and was sitting -- simply sitting there talking to the dog. So I don't think that this is in anyway age related. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Wood.

REP. WOOD (141st):

Thank you for that answer. And that really is to one of my points is animal therapy benefits more than just children and I think this program has tremendous merit I just don't feel it should be under DCF. I think DCF has an enormous task. I think their primary mission is to take care of children in severe needs who do not have parents or whose parents are not functional for whatever reason. And I just -- I don't think we need to put this into statute. I think the nonprofit world can deliver this.

I have concerns following up on Representative Sawyer's good questions about who takes care of the animals, who takes care of training the animals. I just -- I just don't think this belongs in DCF. I think someone else mentioned too, it might have been

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Representative Sawyer that the Connecticut State Police have a terrific animal therapy program. So I would hope that -- I love the concept. I think it has tremendous value. It's proven to have value. I just feel very strongly it should not be one more thing put onto DCF. So I will be opposing this although I do love the mission and appreciate all your work on this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, Madam.

Gentleman from the 42nd, Representative Bowles.

REP. BOWLES (42nd):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in strong support of this bill and would like to commend Representative Urban for introducing this. As a previous social worker for the Department of Children and Families I was involved in both treatment and as an investigator for DCF in a previous life.

About a year ago my wife and I became licensed therapeutic foster parents. We happened to have a farm in eastern Connecticut where we have nine alpacas, a couple of donkeys and two dogs. One dog is an outside dog that guards our alpacas. The other one, Chester is an inside dog. We have had three

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children in our care since becoming licensed through the Department of Children and Families and I have to say firsthand that I've experienced on a daily basis particularly with the two young gentleman that we've had in our care the value of this concept in terms of the therapeutic value of -- of a relationship between -- between the children and -- and animals.

The nature of the therapeutic foster care program is that these kids are in order to get and be eligible for the program they have been traumatized and very clearly all three children that we have had in our care have gone through some very intense, very traumatic situations. So I just want to say that I -- not only do I believe it's the appropriate agency to have this be implemented in but I see a high value in it and again as a previous program manager and worker I believe that there are existing resource within that agency and I know that there are social workers that would be more than willing to step up and be involved in this.

I think the concept of this as being a part of a team, I think the value of having DCF workers involved in it is that they have specialized training in treating children unlike State Police officers who

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while very sensitive about these issues and I know they receive some training they don't receive nearly the same kind of intensive training as DCF workers. So again I commend Representative Urban and thank her for introducing this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, Sir. Gentleman from the 135th, Representative Shaban.

REP. SHABAN (135th):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I may --

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Mr. Speaker.

REP. SHABAN (135th):

Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I have a few questions through you --

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Please proceed:

REP. SHABAN (135th):

Mr. Speaker, to the proponent. Really just a couple of questions. I'm intrigued by this concept although I do have some -- some of the concerns raised. But the questions really go to some of the stuff alluded to earlier. In lines 25 through 27 we say that such team and the team is this crisis

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response team shall operate on a volunteer basis.

Now through you, Mr. Speaker, my question is whether or not the crisis response team would thus be limited only to volunteer organizations or could they also encompass organizations that may do this for a fee? Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. At this point in time to the good Representative we are limiting it to volunteer organizations. I am happy to consider in the future if there are for profit organizations that you think might want to participate at this at no cost to the State but at this point in time we are looking at no cost to the State and we are looking at a program that DCF is already familiar with as it has been instituted through Soul Friends. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Shaban.

REP. SHABAN (135th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think yeah that's really kind of the -- where I got stumbled up on this

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a little bit because just doing some research sitting here while listening to the debate it appears that there are some therapeutic animal programs that are -- apparently get paid sometimes through Medicaid.

I'm not sure if that was considered during the public hearing so -- or at any other point. But I guess my question is would participation in this program impact or somehow jeopardize an entity's Medicaid eligibility? How would that work? Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. That's a -- that was a very -- that's a very good question and we did consider that and yet again that's why it's set up the way it is and would not impact a Medicaid issue. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Shaban.

REP. SHABAN (135th):

Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. And those are the questions I really had. It just kind of jumped out at me that you know if we have -- and it's kind of a

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concern I guess. If we have an animal therapy organization that may in some instances do things under the Medicaid -- or get reimbursed under Medicaid but then also want to participate in a voluntary program whether or not they're actually going to hurt themselves by doing so.

So I don't know the answer to that and I -- I appreciate that candor on that -- on the response because some of these things are complicated. But I thank the Chairwoman for her response and I'll continue to listen to the debate.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, Sir.

Gentleman from the 106th, Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And -- and if I do say it's -- it's a pleasure to see somebody from western Connecticut at the podium.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

I couldn't agree with you more. Proceed, Sir.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

I want to start this conversation off by saying I -- I absolutely love therapy dogs. Boy oh boy I --

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when they sit in your lap and you get to pet them and it's -- it's just a wonderful thing. Being a freshman at the time of the Sandy Hook tragedy I had not yet taken office so at the -- you know at the -- well not wanting -- not wanting to seem like a -- like a camera hog or anything or exploiting anything for political gain I just sort of took a very quiet role and spent a bunch of days at the therapy center that was set up at Newtown's Reed Intermediate School where I got to know several of these dog teams. And they do wonderful work.

It's an unbelievably heartwarming thing to see children and the way they gravitate to these animals. That said, DPS -- my question, through you, Mr. Speaker, is DPS an agency that's so over resourced that -- DCF. I'm sorry.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

DCF, Sir.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

Are they so over resourced that they're looking for additional programs to -- to implement? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

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REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through -- through you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not entirely sure I understand the good Representative's question but I will answer it by saying that DCF is already doing this. They're already collaborating and so it's not as if they're looking to do more.

They're already doing it so they have in essence seen the value as Representative Bowles said of having that trained DCF worker together with a therapy team going into a crisis situation. And they already as I said before do a training entitled considering the importance of the human animal bond for children with trauma stories of hope. And so I'm not sure that I'm answering the good Representative's question. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

Well then allow me to restate this through you, Mr. Speaker. If they're already doing this then where were those therapy teams during the tragedy at Sandy Hook because the teams that I had all of my contact with were from out of state? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

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DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm so glad you asked that question again because Representative Hovey was referring to that and I used a phrase that is an economics phrase and I think she misinterpreted it. What happened was the out of state teams -- and I used the phrase crowded out and I think she interpreted that as push out. Crowded out doesn't mean push out. It's -- it's got -- it's more nuanced than that.

But so what happened was these very organized out of state teams came in and by the time they were functioning there wasn't any room and that would be the idea of crowding out for our own teams who as Representative Hovey very correctly pointed out were not organized. And this bill has brought them together.

They have formed their own organization. And then under the auspices of DP -- DCF will now have an ability to be deployed to these crisis situations. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Bolinsky.

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REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

Thank you very much for that very considerate answer, Representative. Another question, Mr. Speaker. From an organizational standpoint if DCF takes this on will they include these wonderful out of state teams that responded so quickly, so efficiently and if so without cost to Connecticut taxpayers? Will they be included in future dispatches if need be within the State of Connecticut? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. DCF would only be responsible for our own Connecticut teams which again would not be at a cost. They are all volunteers. The out of state teams would be articulating with another organization but it would not be DCF. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

Thank you for -- for that answer. I -- my impressions are that whenever we have a situation --

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and this is -- this is not a question. This is just rhetorical. I'm speaking to myself. So pardon me by you're hearing the inner workings of my brain right now and I feel very bad for you.

But when you have a private sector response versus a public sector response the private sector always seems to arrive first because there you've got these church groups on the ground, no cost, no bureaucracy and nobody worrying about who should respond as opposed to whether it's right to respond. Those teams stayed with us in Newtown for many, many, many weeks and some cases months.

I keep hearing also about the -- the animal therapy and we're talking about dogs but as Representative Hovey referenced before there's also equine therapy teams and they are active in -- in Newtown. As a matter of fact we -- we have a state funded resource there that to this day is still working equine therapy in our second governor's horse guard.

So there's so much going on here and there are so many loving and generous resources out there that I just don't see that -- that this is something that we need to as a State be involved in. Why should we

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legislate loving, caring responses? That's -- I mean pardon me but that's asinine. The fact of the matter is a program like this does not run by itself. It absolutely will not run for free.

So if you have outside agencies that want to provide that level of support and love for goodness sake let them do it and you know lay off of the Connecticut taxpayers. It just doesn't make any sense to me. Again I love therapy dogs I just cannot support this bill because of the way it's being administered.

So before any of my opposition in the next election tells me that I hated the therapy dog bill it's not that I don't like therapy dogs and it's not that I don't appreciate Representative Urban and all of the incredibly wonderful advocacy work that she does but this is just not the right bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER GODFREY:

Thank you, Sir. The Gentleman from the 111th, Representative Frey. And just a second, Representative. Please proceed, Sir.

REP. FREY (110th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the 110th,

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neighbors. Before December 14th I really didn't know a lot about therapy dogs. I knew that none of my dogs were qualified other than giving me therapy occasionally. And I've seen therapy dogs in nursing homes where they're very, very effective. On -- well let me -- well one -- I think -- I think I just have one question for the proponent of the bill. Where was the genesis of this legislation? Was it an organization or was it DCF itself or -- can you explain a little bit? Through you, Mr. -- Mr. Speaker.

]

(DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER IN THE CHAIR.)

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. As Chair of the Children's Committee I was aware of some of these animal therapy organizations. I myself have worked with autistic children with therapy horses and being aware of it and watching what happened in Newtown and realizing that dogs came in from out of state. And then in talking with some of the organizations that

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were crowded out and I use -- I hope now that that term I can use. It -- it appeared to be an opportunity for us to organize our own crisis response teams in our own State. Through you, Madam Chair.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Frey.

REP. FREY (110th):

Thank you. Thank you very much. So it was essentially a committee bill? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Chair. Yes.

REP. FREY (110th):

Okay. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Frey.

REP. FREY (110th):

Thank you. I -- I never -- I haven't seen the therapy dogs at Sandy Hook that worked there. I -- you know it wasn't my district and I didn't want to -- I didn't feel like I should be there really at any point other than to comfort my own family and I think

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many of you are aware of my nieces and nephew they were here last week or the week before who attend Sandy Hook Elementary.

But I can tell you that the dog therapy programs that they put in place however it occurred were nothing short of exceptional. The weekend after the tragedy occurred -- and again I don't know how this all happened, I'm sure some of my colleagues that represent that -- represent Newtown would know.

But there was a -- a center set up around intermediate -- intermediate schools where families could come for counseling and whatnot and they had counseling for children, they had counseling for children and their parents, they had counseling for just the parents. And I've got as I say two nieces and nephew. One of my nieces didn't want to go. She just was not interested but my nephew and -- and one of the other nieces did want to go and they loved it.

And one of the things they loved the most besides the toys and seeing their friends were the therapy dogs. And the next -- they went back the next day and now all three of the kids went back and they went back repeatedly. They're still doing pet therapy.

I know that when school reopened in Chalk Hill in

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Monroe there were plenty of -- I don't know how many but there were ample I think therapy dogs there and kids were able to leave the classroom if they so felt the need to go chill with one of these dogs. And I had one of my constituents from Litchfield who has a pet therapy dog. I'm not sure which organization she works with but she was there and she said the kids would just come in one after another after another all day long.

And at one point she was talking to two girls who were in there petting the golden retriever and they got talking and my niece who usually is a little -- the quieter one started engaging the -- the constituent of mine and realized they're from Litchfield and that night I get a picture sent to me on Facebook with my niece and this therapy dog and she's crouched down hugging this dog. And I know that the dogs were in the classrooms especially some of those that had to deal with some of -- some of the kids who saw things that they really shouldn't have but -- in particular. So I don't know.

Again like the Representative from Newtown I don't want to -- I'm not inclined to vote against a bill called an act concerning animal therapy but I

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just don't really see the need for this. It seems to me the process worked. You know I don't know whether the -- I know that they -- these -- these literally packs of dogs and handlers showed up almost immediately. Who made the phone call or did they come on their own volition? I don't know that. I'm sure someone does. Is DCF the right organization to have this fall under? I've got some doubts about that. Although I think some parts of the bill are good where using therapy dogs within DCF is appropriate.

I'm not sure that's the right agency to handle this. So I don't think -- I don't want to disparage anybody. I don't -- I don't mean to use the term -- using is not the right word. But this bill in light of what happened in Sandy Hook I don't see a connection. I think the pet therapy program worked exceptionally well in Newtown and I don't really see a need for this today so I'm reluctantly not going to support it. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Thank you, Representative Frey.

Representative Srinivasan of the 31st District,
you have the floor, Sir.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

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Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. December 14, Madam Speaker was not just traumatic for us here in Connecticut. It was much, much more than that. It was an atrocity that happened to us in our State. So through you, Madam Speaker. We are talking about this training. We are talking about animal therapy. Would I apply -- I'm not trying to -- it's not for semantics but I just want to make sure that it would apply no matter what whether it be a traumatic event or it is an atrocity. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. And I thank the good Representative for the question. And I think that that really sort of encapsulates why it's a good idea to have this in the Department of Children and Families because they will be the ones that are deploying and so they would be the ones that would decide -- maybe I'm not answering the question, was it atrocity or trauma -- would it be an atrocity or a trauma and the Commissioner of DCF would be deciding. And I would think it would be either an atrocity or a

trauma.

I'm sorry, Representative. I'm -- you know, but I guess where I'm going is that the DCF Commissioner would be making that determinations because they would be deployed as a team. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I want to thank the Representative. I know it is in the semantics between atrocity and trauma because to call December 14 in my opinion a traumatic event when it actually is so much worse, so much, much worse than that and that's why I wanted to make a differentiation between trauma and atrocity.

Through you, Madam Speaker. Who -- I think the Representative started answering this but I just want clarification, who decides as to what events would be considered traumatic? We're not talking about atrocities. Hopefully we never see another atrocity in our lifetime. But in traumatic events who decides that this is a traumatic event or it is not? Through you, Madam Speaker.

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Representative Urban, do you care to address the question again?

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. It's been my experience for instance when there's a suicide at a high school or there is a unfortunate event like that the school superintendent asks for that support and DCF responds to that support. In the case of something like Sandy Hook as we all know it was the Governor. And the Governor mobilized the entire State. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Madam Speaker. So in that scenario where the superintendent of a school asks DCF for help because of the traumatic event that occurred in the school so the -- the help that DCF now will be able to give if this bill were to pass would be not only support that it already -- always has but also include this form of therapy? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

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Through you, Madam Speaker. Yes, at the discretion of the Commissioner.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And through you, Madam Speaker. My final question. My concern is it's -- it's very laudable you know the idea, the concept between -- between the private organizations doing all that they can and the public sector contributing as well. So together in tandem trying to do the best that they can in any and every traumatic event.

So the idea is definitely very laudable. But my concern, Madam Speaker, is this is all within available appropriations. And that to me is very concerning because in situation A -- and we know how stretched DCF is. And we have not given any extra money to them for this. I know there is no fiscal note attached. I'm well aware of that.

So given the fact that there is A no fiscal note, given the fact that DCF is stretched as it is and now we are going to give them this extra charge. My concern is practically speaking realistic -- realistically speaking how affective will we be and

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will they be able to respond in the multiple, multiple
tragic events unfortunately that happen in our State?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (31st):

Through you, Madam Speaker. As Chair of the
Children's Committee I am very -- in constant contact
with the Commissioner of Department of Children and
Families and the legislative liaison and very aware of
their responsibilities.

But yet again I would talk about the actual
wording in the fiscal note which says no fiscal impact
anticipated because DCF has collaborated with Soul
Friends for related employee training entitled -- and
I don't want to repeat the title yet again. So in --
in very, very detailed discussions with the
Commissioner and her deputy commissioners we were very
careful to be sure that because they have already
established this kind of program it would not be too
much for them to bring in some of these teams that are
specifically trained for trauma or atrocity and
familiarize them with the animal therapy teams.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

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DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

And a final question through you, Madam Speaker. knowing very well that both the private and the public sector can work together hand in hand will this in anyway impede or restrict any activity that may be obviously voluntary on the private sector? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. I think that this is really the dawning of a -- a new world where we do have private public partnerships and in this case they're volunteers from the private sector. So I think this is the beginning of really expanding those public private partnerships. So in direct response to your question I -- no it will not crowd out any other private sector help. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

And thank you, Madam Speaker. And I want to

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thank the Chairwoman for her answers. Thank you,
Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Thank you, Representative.

Representative Buck-Taylor of the 67th District,
you have the floor, Madam.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon.

Through you to the Representative who graciously was
the proponent of this bill. I commend the intent and
the stated motivation of presenting this bill. I'm
also aware that it's well known that animal assisted
therapy provides value to people in need. My concern
has to do with the responsibilities that we are
possibly adding to DCF.

Madam Speaker, on lines 13 and 14 it states that
the Department of Children and Families shall develop
and implement training for certain employees. Through
you, I'd like to ask the Representative to explain
what that would entail on the part of DCF.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. Yet again I'll go

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back to the fact that they're already doing this and it would entail these social workers who are already trained to deal with these traumatic situations. Those social workers -- and I don't want to put words in the Commissioner's mouth but my assumption is it would be those social workers who would then articulate with the animal therapy team so that we had a unified team going out. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Buck-Taylor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Through you, Madam Speaker, to the -- Representative Urban. Is it then her understanding that there would be no added responsibility to DCF in providing this training for certain employees and that there would be no extra time or personnel expended in accomplishing this goal? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. The Commissioner has assured me that that is the case.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Buck-Taylor.

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REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Through you, Madam Speaker. In Representative Urban's conversations with the Commissioner did the Commissioner explain where the time and personnel was going to come from in order to complete that task?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. Did not seem appropriate for me as the Chair of Children's to micromanage the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families. She told me that she was okay and that she was -- you know that she could do it within her -- her budget and I accepted that. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Buck-Taylor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Through you, Madam Speaker. If I could also refer to lines 21 and 22 where DCF shall identify a coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team. Could Representative Urban please explain what that would entail? Through you, Madam Speaker.

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DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. They -- they have become self-identified through the group meeting we had and the organization they have formed.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Buck-Taylor, just a moment please.

If the Chamber could please make an effort to take their conversations outside. It's been difficult to hear some of the discussion. Thank you.

Representative Buck-Taylor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you to Representative Urban. Line 21 requires DCF to develop a crisis response program. I would also inquire as to what that would entail to Representative Urban through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. We -- we sort of discussed this before and it was brought in these discussions with the Commissioner of the Department of

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Children and Families and our newly formed Connecticut Crisis Response Team, it was observed that it would probably be a really good idea if we actually moved forward and made this into a program. And so it would be in consultation with those teams as well as the -- the Commissioner that that would happen. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Buck-Taylor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Madam Speaker, there have been many people who have talked about the fact that DCF has been in crisis in the past and being able to follow the mandates given it already to protect the children and preserve the families of this State. I find it difficult to believe that there is the time and personnel available in order accomplish what is expected to be accomplished under this bill.

My concern is that we hear that there are no costs associated with this and I think that's possibly a misdirection and that there are costs. There are people who are going to have to put in their time. There are people that are going to have to put in their effort and that is a cost because there are only

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so many hours in the day, Madam Speaker, and if they're going to spending hours doing this they're not going to be spending hours performing the mandates that they are already having difficulty accomplishing. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Thank you, Representative.

Representative Carter of the 2nd District.

REP. CARTER (2nd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. A few questions through you to the proponent of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Please proceed.

REP. CARTER (2nd):

Thank you very much. Madam -- through you, Madam Speaker. I'm curious, you mentioned earlier that there was no liability on the organizations but is there any liability to the DCF is something would say go wrong, an animal bites or something like that? Where does the liability fall? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

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Through you, Madam Speaker. No.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Carter.

REP. CARTER (2nd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. Where -- who would be liable if a dog bites a child who's under the therapy of one of these groups? Through you, Madam Speaker.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you --

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. The insurance is covered and -- the -- the liability insurance covers the members as long as the members are within the rules of the particular organization. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Carter.

REP. CARTER (2nd):

Thank you very much. And through you, Madam Speaker. What kind of status do these groups enjoy when they are responding to a crisis? Are they part

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of the emergency medical services? Are they part of the State? How does that work? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. Sorry. Prior to our offering this bill these teams were -- are doing things like going into schools to teach children to read. They are going to preschool programs where there are adopted children who are having difficulty with their adoptive parents.

They're doing a myriad of things that they have volunteered and put within their -- their organization's mission statements so it's -- there has been -- there hasn't been a statewide organization. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Carter.

REP. CARTER (2nd):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And that's exactly why I'm asking these questions because there hasn't been a statewide organization. These are -- are volunteer groups. You know as we move forward if

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we do decide to put them under the umbrella of the State of be coordinating -- I'm just curious if we're inferring any kind of status on them.

For instance you know when we look at a -- emergency medical personnel if you assault them or something happens or there's an altercation that carries stiffer fines. We just did that recently with class D felonies. If somebody's injured in the State you know there's worker comp issues, things like that. I just want to make sure I understand exactly what these groups will be when they are working or under the auspices of a State organization.

Through you, Madam Speaker, could the good Chairman give me a little more information about whether they maintain their volunteer status or whether they'll be regarded as more of a State resource?

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you -- through you, Madam Speaker. They are now known as the Connecticut Animal Assistance Crisis Response Teams and they are -- as long as they are volunteers they are covered for their work and it

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does not involve the State. It would not involve the State in anything. And -- I was going to say it would be really bad if one of the therapy animals did something bad. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Carter.

REP. CARTER (2nd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I -- and I thank the good Chairwoman for her answers. And please don't think for a minute I'm inferring that a therapy animal is any way going to bite or injure a child. It just -- I was trying to understand where the ownership of liability would lie. You know I think it's well -- well documented at this point and there's an emerging science about animal therapy that it works, that it helps people, it lowers blood pressure, it helps with stress, it helps with flying. I mean we've done a lot in this Chamber I think to encourage animal therapy, therapy dogs, et cetera.

Like many people here I do have a little bit of concern any time that we are expanding a role in our State government even if we are utilizing volunteers because I'm the first person here to say we need to partner with nonprofits in this world to make sure

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we're doing things together, we're doing things smart.
And I do think there's a huge opportunity before us.
That doesn't mean I don't have concerns about us as a
State taking the role of coordinating all that.

I'm not sure where I stand on that yet and I
haven't decided even how I'm going to vote for that
matter. I tend to keep listening as we move along.
But I think that's something we do need to think about
just what exactly the role is we are doing here
because I do know that eventually -- I shouldn't say I
do know, I believe that the questions that came up
during the public hearings alluded the fact that even
DCF thought there might be a cost incurred.

They weren't sure. That's always been the
question. So I think once we put something like this
in place we need to understand that we may be asked to
do a commitment to it in the future. And I'm not
saying that's necessarily a bad thing. But right now
we're saying there's no cost, there's no fiscal note.
I get it. But I just want to make sure we're making a
wise decision in the State supporting the role and
making these organizations our frontline in -- in
therapy. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Thank you.

Representative -- Representative Phil Miller of
the 36th District.

REP. P. MILLER (36th):

Thank you and good afternoon, Madam Speaker. I
rise in strong support of this bill. I think clearly
we all recognize that in this assembly all of us are
generalists by nature and we all bring certain
strengths -- you -- typically due to our professional
background. The proponent of this bill has a very
deep and rich background in animal care.

She's worked her whole life with working animals
and many years with therapeutic animals. Just the
fact that she thinks this is a good fit and not too
heavy a lift for me is enough to say that I support
this bill. But as I've looked further into it I've
come to think that all of us as generalists I think
clearly understand the therapeutic value of animals
which are trained specifically for these tasks.

I think any of us who saw footage or were present
in the days following December 14 saw the value of
having these animals and you could literally see that
when these animals were working with people you could
literally see their body postures soften up and you

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could well see the therapeutic value. I like this bill because it allows us here in Connecticut to mobilize our citizen volunteer core, people who have a deep commitment to train and have these animals available for this great therapeutic value.

We certainly hope that we never have to face a tragedy of the proportions that we saw in December but yet realistically we clearly know that in our future we're going to have fires and untimely explosions and murders and suicides and other accidents which will be very traumatic for people of all ages.

And the prospect that we'll be able to quickly and efficiently mobilize our own citizen resources here locally in Connecticut where the commitment can be much fuller and can last longer I think is a very positive thing. And the last thing I want to say in support of this bill is that I think we clearly have all heard over a number of years that the Department of Child and Family Services has been -- has had some issues in the past, has had some organizational and administrative challenges but I think it's clear that in recent times we've seen vast improvement over the last couple of years.

Commissioner Katz herself has made herself

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available to many of our committees and has I think gone above and beyond as far as being available and being answerable. And I think she and her team of administrators had a pretty good handle on what they can and can't do and I think if they feel that they can take this on within existing budgets and parameters I -- I think that's good enough.

I think they're gauging their own abilities pretty well. So for these and other reasons I'm going to support this bill. I think it's a timely bill. And I thank the Gentle lady for her gracious sponsorship of this and I urge my colleagues to vote in support of this. Thank you, Madam Chair -- Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Miner.

REP. MINER (66th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. If I might just a few questions to the proponent of the bill please.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Please proceed.

REP. MINER (66th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. let me just say on the front -- on the front end of this that there is not a

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night that I go home and don't immediately calm down sitting next to one of our cats or one of our dogs. It is without question something that I hope the dog gets as much enjoyment out of as I do because it does have a calming effect. Not so much when I have to throw the Frisbee for an hour but the relaxation when I get home is very therapeutic. I -- my concerns about the bill however is that -- concerns are, do we know -- I don't even know if these entities are registered somewhere.

Do we have a system of checking whether or not they are actual entities registered with the State of Connecticut and therefore if someone wanted to make a claim against someone do we have a mechanism in place already in the State of Connecticut where they know who to go to, they know how to file a complaint, they know what to do? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. There is a national organization that does this called Hope AACR which as I said before was established after Kip Kinkel went to Thurston High School and did what he did there. And

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it's the national organization has set up the standards and has the training.

But to be very candid through -- to the good Representative this is a beginning type of organization and it's been very much volunteer oriented.

And that's why we're very careful about the insurance aspects of it as they form their own -- and I really think that's one of the most amazing things that has happened here that they've formed their own Connecticut animal assistance crisis response team. They now have their own website and they are looking to doing their own training in Connecticut. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Miner.

REP. MINER (66th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I'm not trying to in any way diminish what they do, impugn who they are but my question still stands and that is do we have a mechanism in the State of Connecticut by which someone who feels they have been harmed or wronged can reach out to a State agency and -- and how would that process work? Through you, Madam Speaker.

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DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. The Consumer Protection would certainly be someone that they could reach out to if they thought that something had happened. But there has never been an incident when you're dealing with therapy dogs and that was one of the questions that we asked. And seeing there has never been an incident it was sort of okay, maybe the Consumer Protection Agency.

And when asked the Commissioner there yeah because that seems to be the -- the biggest place for a consumer complaint. Unless, as the good Representative Carter pointed out if there was an injury which would really be unusual then it would be through another -- another avenue which would be your -- through the law and judiciary. But yet again that has never happened. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Miner.

REP. MINER (66th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And if the Gentle lady could tell me is there anything under our current

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statutory framework that would prohibit the agencies that are cited in this bill from taking on this responsibility now without legislative action?

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban, would you care to address that again?

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. Not to my knowledge.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Miner.

REP. MINER (66th):

Again, acknowledging that I think there's something to this that could be very beneficial I'm also mindful of the fact that athletics is beneficial, camps are beneficial, certainly educational facilities are beneficial. All of those have structure.

There's no question about which agency someone goes to, whose charge they fall under whether or not we feel they are involved enough with our youth that they need to be cleared through some certification process, whether they need a background check. I think it would be great if there was a way that this could just function without our involvement to be

quite honest with you.

If at some point in time something happened and people felt as part of a natural response, a trigger mechanism so to speak, someone showed up with a big cat or a big dog somewhere and made somebody feel nice, took some of the sting out of a very painful situation. But the way this seems to be set up we're asking someone to establish a relationship between the State of Connecticut and entities that we don't have any control over, we don't have any oversight over and they're going to be in situations where I think if I heard the Gentle lady correctly a while ago they will come under State overriding authority.

And so there is whether we think so or not some presumption that we've blessed this. And I think there is an obligation on the part of the State to kind of think this through a little bit farther.

I wish there were other pieces of this that actually established that relationship between these entities and some agency in the State of Connecticut before we said let's go ahead and put this thing in place and we'll be prepared next time to turn these good people loose. But it seems like what this bill says is let's develop this -- this program, turn these

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people loose and hope that it all works out all right.

I very much want to support this because I -- I don't always get a chance to support things that are brought up by this Representative and more often than not I think we do connect on some of these issues in some way.

This one I -- you know I think does have some merit but I am very troubled that it seems to put the -- the initiative in place before what I think would be some of the well-grounded, well founded securities that I think the taxpayers in the State of Connecticut would expect that we would have in place. I have no idea whether the Department of Consumer Protection is watching the television and someone's surprised to know that this will become their responsibility but I am very concerned about the way this is being done.

I would be less concerned if someone came back next year and said we've done this now for a year and these are the things that we think we need to have statutory authority for. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Thank you, Representative.

Representative Betts, you have the floor, Sir.

REP. BETTS (78th):

Thank you very much, Madam Chair -- Madam Speaker. And this is for the second time but I'll be brief. First of all I'd like to clarify something that I'm very confused about. And that's dealing with the role of DCF here and the cost involved. I think in the debate we've all heard that there's going to be costs involved not only at the beginning but in the future of this program.

And I am looking at the testimony given by the Commissioner on February 26 regarding her statements on the role of DCF and particularly the financial challenges it would put to her Department. And I quote in her statement, in the current fiscal climate there may not be funds available to accomplish what this bill seeks however we are willing to work with the proponents of the legislation to seek private funds to accomplish many of the worthy goals of this bill.

And I remember talking to her after the testimony to see if she would follow up on that and we all seem to be on the same page. We all thought that was a good road to follow especially considering the fiscal challenges of the State budget. And I also had pledged to her that if there was anything we could do

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to lighten the role -- the load of not only her agency but any State agency so they could fulfill their mission to please let me know because frankly we have given more than what a lot of these agencies can handle.

And I do believe the Gentle lady from -- from the Chair of Children's Committee when she tells me that she's talked to the Commissioner and the Commissioner's on board with this. What I would like to ask, through you, Madam Speaker to the proponent is what specifically took place since the time she gave that testimony in which she very specifically said -- or expressed the concern her agency would have a trouble meeting the fiscal responsibilities for this and particularly with the training because of the fiscal climate and because she had offered very generously to try and help raise funds with a lot of us in the private sector.

Could the Gentle lady enlighten us as to what changed the Commissioner's mind about that position to where we are now where she's been assured that the Commissioner is very much on board? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

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Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. Absolutely. That would be the strike all amendment which we took under advisement the good Ranking Member's suggestions. It was the strike all amendment which changed the bill significantly which allowed her to feel totally comfortable in supporting it without -- within her budget parameters. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78th):

Thank you very much. And thank you for that answer. I still am -- am conflicted. I empathize with the Commissioner because this is a good program but we all understand that there's going to be some significant costs with this. And we don't want to put programs in place to agencies where they're -- they're likely to fail because they don't have the resources to fulfill it.

And one of the problems I have not only because of the fiscal responsibility but because it's a new program. And as we all know new programs incur additional costs as we move forward. That's why I

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think a -- a better first step to have this done in the private sector, in the nonprofit sector rather than add one more additional thing to State agencies right now. In closing I'd -- or let me ask one final question and then I'll make a closing comment.

Through you, Madam Speaker Am I wrong to assume that if this bill were not to pass that the -- the use of animal therapy dogs would still be allowed and used as it was with Sandy Hook if we were not to adopt this -- this bill? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Through you, Madam Speaker. I'm going to try to answer that correctly because the way you worded it. So if I don't do it correctly by all means ask it again. Animal therapy dogs are currently in service in the State of Connecticut. I myself was at a program called muttigrees as opposed to pedigrees with preschool kids. And I have been to many of these.

So they are absolutely in use throughout the State of Connecticut. Without this bill what would happen is we would not have the team of the DCF worker and the animal therapy team nor would we have the

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coordination of DCF to deploy that team at the moment of crisis. Does that answer your question? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78th):

Yes. Thank you very much. I thank the Gentle lady for that answer. And let me just close or make some final comments. Ladies and gentlemen this bill is not about the merits or the value of animal therapy.

We all understand and appreciate the value of that. It's not only used for children but it's also used for adults. And they have enormous benefits that they provide to us and frankly even if it wasn't for that animals in themselves give unconditional love and they do as Representative Miner said, provide some tremendous comfort and are just such loving, loving animals.

This I would submit to you is a debate about whether this new program should be operated and administered in the private sector versus becoming a new program under State government. Is this one of the primary missions and roles of State government to

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administer programs like this?

So when we vote this is not a vote about the value of the necessity or the benefits of animal therapy. What we're voting on is do we want to put this additional responsibility on a State agency that already has some very significant pressures both fiscally and programmatically?

Do we want to add this to their list right now in this climate or do we want to exercise what I think is the common sense approach of having the private sector begin that process now and when times are better if this General Assembly thinks it makes more sense to have a State government do it lets debate it at that point.

But for those reasons I will be voting against this. And I thank the Gentle lady for her answers and Madam Speaker, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Thank you, Representative Betts.

Representative Giegler, you have the floor,
Madam.

REP. GIEGLER (138th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been sitting here

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listening to this bill that's been debated for quite a while and didn't think I was going to say anything but in -- as -- as I sit here and listen I -- you really know that it's not about animal therapy. I think none of us here would even disagree that the -- what dogs provide having had Labrador retrievers my whole life I know what they can do for people.

But I think it's more about the role that the State would play in this program. We have many nonprofits within the State of Connecticut, Guiding Eyes, Fidelco, Pegasus. They're all organizations that work with animals. Guiding Eyes, Fidelco work with the hearing impaired. Pegasus allows individuals that are handicapped to use horses. We didn't ask the State to provide these programs nor do they really want to be part of the State.

But we also know that we have phenomenal nonprofits within all of our own towns who whenever there's a tragedy always step up to the cause. And what happened in our western part of Connecticut no one asked these therapy dogs to come. It's a church group that came from the State of Pennsylvania, that willingly came and devoted 24 hours a day service to children that really needed it.

We didn't ask them as a State. There's certain times that I think that the State does not have to be involved in activities that we have within the State because we have people that are willing to do it for us. We also see that DCF has had issues in the past. They're overwhelmed often with some of their programs that they've had to -- to run.

This is just an additional program that I feel is really outside their purview and at this point in time it's not about animal therapy it's more about who should be running it. And I really think that the private nonprofits are the ones that should be doing it as they are now. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Thank you, Representative.

Will you remark further? Will you remark further on the bill as amended? Will you remark further? If not, will staff and guests please come to the well of the House. Will members please take your seats. The machine will be opened.

THE CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by roll.
Members to the Chamber. The House of Representatives is voting by roll. Members to the Chamber please.

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DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Have all the members voted? Will the members please check the board to determine if your vote is properly cast. If all members have voted the machine will be locked and the Clerk will take a tally. The Clerk will please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

Madam Speaker, House Bill 6465 as amended by House A.

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Total Number Voting | 139 |
| Necessary for Adoption | 70 |
| Those voting aye | 98 |
| Those voting nay | 41 |
| Absent and not voting | 11 |

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

The bill as amended has passed.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar number 436.

THE CLERK:

Madam Speaker, House Calendar number 436, on page 25, substitute Senate Bill number 188, AN ACT CONCERNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, AND UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RITTER:

Representative Tercyak, you have the floor.

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**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2013**

**VOL. 56
PART 13
3813 - 4129**

THE CLERK:

On Page 23, Calendar 587, House Bill Number 6465, AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL THERAPY, Favorable Report of the Select Committee on CHILDREN.

THE CHAIR:

Oh. Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, I move acceptance of the Joint Committee's Joint Favorable Report and I urge passage of the bill, in concurrence with the House of Representatives.

THE CHAIR:

Motion is on acceptance and passage, in concurrence with the House.

Will you remark?

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Yes. Thank you, Madam President.

This bill -- the purpose of this bill is to institute a system of coordinated statewide response and establish training protocols for registered animal therapy teams.

DCF in -- within available appropriations, would be developing and implementing a training program, which would be focused on the healing value for children of animal therapy. As also -- also, the value of animals in coping with trauma and the benefit of animal-assisted therapy programs.

The second component of this legislation would have DCF and the Department of Agriculture, within available appropriations, identifying coordinated Volunteer Canine Crisis Response Teams. A team would be constituted by a handler with a canine. They would

be well trained, evaluated, and registered by animal-assisted activity organizations and the team would provide aid to individuals during and after traumatic events. Within 24 hours they would be expected to be deployed.

And then the third component is that DCF and the Governor's Prevention Partnership, alongside with Animal-Assisted Therapy Community, again, within available appropriations, would develop a Crisis Response Program, utilizing the Crisis Response Teams to provide animal-assisted therapy to children living with trauma and loss.

And with that, Madam President, I urge passage of this bill.

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark? Will you remark?

Senator Linares.

SENATOR LINARES:

Thank you, Madam President.

Once again, it was -- it was great to work with Senator Bartolomeo on -- on this bill. I do support this bill.

I think that it will create a certain -- a -- a tremendous amount of value for people who have, under terrible circumstances, suffered a trauma in their life. I think it's great to coordinate volunteers to work together on this. And I think it certainly provides a tremendous amount of value for everyone and is a win-win situation.

So I do support this. And I ask my colleagues to support this measure as well.

Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

Will you remark?

Senator Frantz.

SENATOR FRANTZ:

Thank you, Madam President.

I stand in strong favor of the bill. And I want to thank you for working hard on this and bringing it out today.

In recent times, we've seen these animals at work and they are effective. In Sandy Hook, in particular, where they are still based, they've had volunteer corps of dogs up there since December 15th or 16th, I think, is when they first arrived. And if you get to see how these kids interact with these dogs there is no question -- I know you've been there yourself and you've seen this, Madam President. And -- and it's -- there's nothing short of the word magic what these animals can bring to first and second and third graders who are going through and will be for quite sometime to come, the kind of trauma that they, in fact, are.

And more recently, these kinds of animals received a great deal of coverage in the Oklahoma tornado disaster, just about seven, eight days ago. And CNN, I think, every day ran about six or eight times this story of all the different volunteer groups that would bring their therapy dogs in to help these different people with their terrible traumatic situations, especially the younger people, especially the folks, but -- but literally everybody. Everybody seems to like dogs and everybody seems to respond to dogs who are well trained for this particular task.

And I'm glad we're addressing this as a State and as policy and also I like the part of the bill that talks about studying the volunteer groups that -- that do this, because there are quite a few out there and there are a lot more people who, if they understood this whole process, would want to become in the -- involved in the process of providing these dogs on a volunteer basis and I think that's the way to go.

So Senator Bartolomeo, thank you very much.

Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Cassano.

Will you remark further?

Senator Witkos.

SENATOR WITKOS:

Thank you, Madam President.

I would also like to offer my sincere thanks to Senator Bartolomeo and Senator Linares for bringing the bill forward.

You know, there is no other means of unconditional love between an individual, irregardless of age, and -- and a pet. You know, I've had the opportunity, on occasion, to see folks that are -- were in -- in distress or they were in depression and just the -- the sight of their eyes lighting up when the -- the dog would come up and jump on their lap or -- or give them a kiss, that they had somebody to hold onto and -- and hug. And it just meant so -- not only so much to the individual there, but the dog's tag was -- the dog's tail was wagging a hundred miles an hour and just was a warm fuzzy all over.

And this is the type of thing that we can do as a State to coordinate these types of things that we -- there's really relatively no cost. Imagine that. Just being part of a team that brings your animal down to give love to somebody who -- who needs it. And -- and if we can do more things like that, we're -- we're going to have a greater society.

And so I -- I want to thank the two Senators for bringing the bill out. And look forward to its passage and voting for it.

Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

Will you remark further? Will you remark?

Senator Cassano.

SENATOR CASSANO: . . .

Thank you, Madam President.

Just a brief comment. I've been very fortunate to be involved in a group called Purple Heart Homes, which creates -- builds homes for veterans. And we have a veteran that's been back for a while and she's had some really difficult issues. Was hospitalized for seven months. And she has one of these dogs. I -- when I first met her, I -- she could hardly get a sentence out. If you could see how much she has progressed in these last eight months during this process, it is absolutely phenomenal.

And everywhere she goes, the dog is there. And that dog has provided so much comfort and has allowed her to open up. That it's just -- it's -- it's just a wonderful thing to see and I'm glad we have a bill like this.

Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

Will you remark? Will you remark?

Senator Bartolomeo.

Senator McKinney will you start? Did you want to speak sir?

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, what, through you, a question to the proponent.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed, sir.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Is the -- is the goal here that the Department of Children and Families would have available to them the ability to use animal therapy for its clients?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, through you.

Actually, DCF does do some animal therapy already and I believe that that's done with horses and -- and other types of large animals. And what DCF's role in this would be would be really the training and organizing and implementing, making sure that we had standards. The goal is actually to have teams of volunteer organizations, such as Soul Friends, which my Co-Chair in the House has been working with for many, many years.

Soul Friends is one organization. There is Hope. There's a whole bunch of others that already do this, but we don't have any kind of standards within the state of Connecticut. So it would simply be -- we do not want to have, as we did in other situations, a variety of volunteers with the best of intentions arrive on a scene, where we need to be very careful about who's there. We don't have that happen and -- and have to turn them away as we have in the past. We want to make sure that we have teams ready to go who

have already been vetted and trained and to a certain standard so that we're comfortable utilizing and implementing them at a moment's notice.

Through you, Madam -- Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

And under what circumstances would the State turn away volunteers who -- whether they're nonprofit organization or otherwise, want to use animals to help certain families, kids, or people in trauma. What -- I'm not opposed to the bill, I'm just -- let me ask that question.

Under what circumstances -- you said the State's turned people away. When would we turn people away?

THE CHAIR:

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, through you.

The situation that I'm referring to is -- is when Newtown happened, there was 295 volunteers who wanted to help in that situation and yet, because often at -- at crisis scenes people arrive with the best of intentions, but we -- we're not always certain that those are the best people to help in those circumstances, we were -- the -- the decision was made at the time, at Newtown, that actually they needed to recruit and bring in from out-of-state teams that were already certified and had gone through a protocol.

So it's a situation such as that, that we would like to be able to have teams available and ready that we were confident in their abilities, that had gone through the rigor of some type of a training and been

vetted in some type of way, so that we could use teams within the state of Connecticut.

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

And I guess that -- I guess that's reason for my questions. I saw this work in Newtown. I saw legitimate animal therapy organizations come in and work. I saw the Commissioner of DCF on the scene. I saw her organization and every agency of the state of Connecticut, virtually, maybe every one, work in an almost unimaginable efficiency and cooperation. It -- it was remarkable. It makes me wonder why we can't do that in the easiest of circumstances, when we do it -- when the State did it so well in the most difficult of circumstances. So what was missing that we need to -- we need to -- I just don't understand what we need to do.

We're -- we're aware of the benefits of animal -- animal therapy. The DCF seems to be aware of situations when it can be beneficial, when it's not. We're aware of the organizations that do this. I'm pretty sure it's not difficult to vet the organizations that are, perhaps more legitimate or more successful or more capable of doing this. I don't know if it should matter whether the organization's from Rhode Island or Connecticut. We're talking about non-profit organizations.

So what are we doing here that -- tell me why we're not adding a layer of government bureaucracy to what seems to be already working.

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, through you.

I think it would probably be a judgment call as to what's already working. So the response that we have heard from those who were on the scene was that, you know, as you can imagine during any crisis scene, people sometimes insert themselves be -- into that, that maybe shouldn't be there. So we would like to make sure that we're -- we are -- you mentioned the word vetting after I had as well. We want to make sure that we're vetting those people who should be allowed onto the scene to be able to help.

This simply gives that kind of a -- a structure, and a -- a setup and a training to make sure that those who do want to help are there for the right reasons and do understand the implications of what they're doing. So we already have organizations who have been established since this legislation has been floating around this building, for the purposes of being able to go through the training. It is simply a way to make sure that we are protecting those who are in crisis and have a system within Connecticut so that we feel comfortable that we are doing such.

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

Okay, so, with respect to a Volunteer Canine Response Team, the Commissioner of DCS -- DCF has to consult with the -- the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture. In this case, she would then ask -- so Commissioner Katz would ask the Commissioner of Agriculture if he could identify a coordinated Volunteer Canine Response Crisis Response Team.

And that would be dog handlers and dogs who are trained, evaluated, and registered by -- as an organization that provides aid to individuals during and after traumatic events. They would operate on a volunteer basis and they would be able to provide animal-assisted therapy in -- in a -- within 24 hours' notice.

But what if -- what if the community where a tragedy happened wanted to have a bake sale to honor somebody who tragically lost their lives to raise money, whether for a charity in the person's name or any other reason, bring family, friends, community people, loved ones together and the organizers of that wanted to bring in an animal therapy group. Would they have to coordinate with DCF? Would it -- would it have to be someone approved by the department or could it be a charitable animal therapy group that they know from Maryland?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Madam President.

And through you.

I do not believe and it is not this legislator's intent that there's anything in here that would exclude that from being able to happen. It's simply to set up a structure so that those on the receiving end would be comfortable with the fact that we had well trained volunteers ready to help them. I do not read anything in this legislation, to the good Senator, that would say that your scenario couldn't happen.

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you. And -- and I appreciate that, because I -- I guess what I'm having a hard time understanding -- I understand the need of vetting -- we -- right? I understand the need of making sure people who are charged with the awesome responsibility of caring for kids in crisis or people in crisis, that they understand the value of animal therapy and anything else that could be used on a case-by-case basis in their professional judgment to help those in crisis. So this is all great stuff. I'm just trying to -- I'm -- I'm having a hard time understanding what -- would this only operated in instances where DCF is called in to help?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Madam President.

Through you.

And I did just read through this again. And there's nothing in here that would exclude your scenario from happening. And no. DCF would be part of the -- the team to be able to train and to be able to set up these Crisis Response Teams and to be able to develop a Crisis Response Program that would be available to be called in, in a variety of scenarios. It would not be something that simply had to involve DCF.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you.

And I -- and I -- and I do appreciate it, because it I -- so then in -- this is -- this is an important resource that is being offered, but if people aren't seeking out that resource from DCF or the State, but might find it in other places, they're not prohibited from doing that then?

Through you.

Is that correct, Madam President?

THE CHAIR:

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Madam President.

Through you.

That is correct. If -- if they're aware of this through -- through other resources, and I might mention the Governor's Prevention Partnership is also one of those resources that is available to help in difficult situations and they will be part of this. And there's also a larger organization that does this in other States throughout the nation, called Hope.

And I would point out that they -- they go to situations or crises, including major hurricanes, wildfires, train derailments, school shootings. So they're -- this is something that's happening in other states as well. And it seems to be a very valuable and helpful resource to the victims in these scenarios, which is why we would like the state of Connecticut to stand ready.

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you. And -- and I'm not trying to go backwards in my questioning, but you're right. And -- and I guess I'm trying to -- there -- there, you know -- I -- I guess I can only bring it down to my actual experience. Standing in -- in Edmond Town Hall, which is the old town hall in Newtown, and seeing maybe about seven or eight people, several dog handlers, I think there were three or four dogs and they were all wearing blue T-shirts. I don't know what was written on them. They introduced themselves to me. This was, you know, probably a week or more after December 14th. And they were from an organization, I -- I believe in -- in Baltimore. That's my memory. And they had come up because they knew the value of animal therapy. They knew the pain that people in town were suffering, especially young kids, and how the animal therapy might be or could be or, in some circumstances, definitely is, helpful to the young kids.

I -- I just want to be make sure we're -- we're not trying to stop that from happening, but we're just saying that if -- if government's getting involved or, in the event of a crisis, people reach out to government for help, one of the assets, tools we'll have is -- is this.

Is that -- is that a fair way to describe what we're doing?

Through you.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Through you, Madam President.

That is absolutely a fair way to say it. And I would also like to stipulate that the government is doing the training and the implementing and the setting up, but there are still volunteer organizations, like Soul Friends and others, that would be doing this. And it's because they are specially trained. It's not just any person and their dog. It's often social

workers and their dog. It's people that are trained in this. But yes, you are -- you are correct.

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

And my last question. Hopefully, it will be my last question. And I apologize if you said this in bringing out the bill. I'm -- I'm assuming DCF is supportive of this bill, but I -- I just -- I feel the need to ask out loud and get an answer. Given the enormous challenges that they have at DCF, that the -- the burden of developing and implementing training for -- for DCF staff is one that they're comfortable that they can assume. Is that a fair question?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Madam President.

Through you.

Yes, they are please with this bill. They do support this bill. And they do, to some extent, as I said, with larger animals already.

Thank you, Madam President.

Through you.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you.

I thank the Senator for answering my questions.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

Will you remark? Will you remark?

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Madam President.

And I do want to also point out that I truly appreciate the support on both sides of the aisle here.

And with that, if there is no objection, I would ask that it go on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Is there -- seeing no objection, it will go on the Consent -- it will go on the Consent Calendar.

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On Page 21, Calendar 577, House Bill Number 6652, AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR AND TECHNICAL CHANGES TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STATUTES, Favorable Report of the Committee on COMMERCE.

THE CHAIR:

Senator LeBeau.

Good evening, sir.

SENATOR LEBEAU:

Would move to place that item also on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, now would ask the Clerk to call the items on the first Consent Calendar, so that we might proceed to a vote on that Consent Calendar.

Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On Page 5, Calendar 278, Senate Bill 709; Calendar 333, House Bill 5759; Calendar 334, House Bill 6396; Calendar 340, House Bill 6211.

On Page 8, Calendar 357, House Bill 6349 and Calendar 398, Senate Bill 1065.

On Page 11, Calendar 457, House Bill 5564 and Calendar 462, House Bill 5908.

On Page 15, Calendar 516, House Bill 5500; Calendar 521, House Bill 6407.

On Page 19, Calendar 558, House Bill 6340.

Page 21, Calendar 574, House Bill 6534; Calendar 575, House Bill 6562; and Calendar 577, House Bill 6652.

Page 23, Calendar 587, House Bill 6465; Calendar 589, House Bill 6447.

On Page 24, Calendar 599, House Bill 6458.

Page 25, Calendar 602, House Bill 5614.

And on Page 29, Calendar 622, House Bill 5278;
Calendar 625, House Bill 6624.

Page 39, Calendar 223, Senate Bill 954 and Calendar
227, Senate Bill 819.

And on Page 46, Calendar 100, Senate Bill 273 and
Calendar 137, Senate Bill 837.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, please call for a roll call vote and the
machine will be open on the first Consent Calendar.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate.
Members to the Chamber. Immediate roll call has been
ordered in the Senate on today's first Consent
Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

All members have voted, all members have voted.

The machine will be closed.

Mr. Clerk will you please call the tally.

THE CLERK:

On today's first Consent Calendar:

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Total Number Voting | 34 |
| Necessary for Adoption | 18 |
| Those voting Yea | 34 |
| Those voting Nay | 0 |
| Those absent and not voting | 2 |

THE CHAIR:

Consent Calendar passes.

The Senate will stand at ease.

(Chamber at ease.)