



# House of Representatives

## File No. 784

General Assembly

January Session, 2015

**(Reprint of File No. 22)**

House Bill No. 6725  
As Amended by House Amendment  
Schedule "A"

Approved by the Legislative Commissioner  
May 7, 2015

### ***AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 17a-22ee of the general statutes is repealed and the  
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

3 (a) For purposes of this section: [.]

4 (1) "Animal-assisted activity" means any activity that involves a  
5 team consisting of a registered handler and therapy animal interacting  
6 with individuals in the state;

7 (2) ["animal-assisted therapy"] "Animal-assisted therapy" means  
8 goal-directed intervention in which [animals are] a team consisting of a  
9 therapist and a therapy animal, or a therapist, registered handler and a  
10 therapy animal, is used as an integral part of the [crisis response]  
11 therapy process to aid individuals who have (A) experienced mental,  
12 physical or emotional trauma, (B) witnessed, or have been a victim of,  
13 an act of violence, or (C) behavioral health care needs;

14       (3) ["animal-assisted therapy community"] "Animal-assisted activity  
15 community" means the local or regional entities capable of providing  
16 animal-assisted therapy or animal-assisted activities to individuals  
17 within the state; [and]

18       (4) ["animal-assisted activity organization"] "Animal-assisted  
19 activity organization" means any entity involved in training,  
20 evaluating [and] or registering members of the animal-assisted  
21 [therapy] activity community; [.]

22       (5) "Animal-assisted critical incident response team" means a team  
23 of registered handlers and therapy animals that (A) has been identified  
24 by the Department of Children and Families, and (B) is capable of  
25 providing animal-assisted activities to individuals during and after  
26 traumatic events;

27       (6) "Registered handler" means an individual who has been  
28 screened, trained and registered by a national animal therapy  
29 organization to engage in animal-assisted activities or animal-assisted  
30 therapy, or both;

31       (7) "Therapist" means any (A) physician licensed pursuant to  
32 chapter 370 who specializes in psychiatry, (B) psychologist or  
33 professional counselor licensed pursuant to chapter 383, (C) marital  
34 and family therapist licensed pursuant to chapter 383a, or (D) clinical  
35 social worker or master social worker licensed pursuant to chapter  
36 383b; and

37       (8) "Therapy animal" means any animal trained to provide comfort  
38 to individuals who have (A) experienced mental, physical or emotional  
39 trauma, (B) witnessed, or have been a victim of, an act of violence, or  
40 (C) behavioral health care needs.

41       (b) Not later than January 1, [2014] 2016, the Commissioner of  
42 Children and Families shall, within available appropriations, develop  
43 and implement training for certain employees of the Department of  
44 Children and Families and mental health care providers on (1) the

45 healing value of the human-animal bond for children, (2) the value of  
46 therapy animals in dealing with traumatic situations, and (3) the  
47 [benefit of an] benefits of animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted  
48 therapy. [program.]

49 (c) Not later than January 1, [2014] 2016, the Commissioner of  
50 Children and Families, in consultation with the Commissioner of  
51 Agriculture and within available appropriations, shall [identify a  
52 coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team. Such team shall  
53 consist of various handlers and canines that have been trained,  
54 evaluated and registered by an animal-assisted activity organization to  
55 provide aid to individuals during and after traumatic events] develop  
56 a protocol to identify and mobilize animal-assisted critical incident  
57 response teams throughout the state. Such [team] teams shall operate  
58 on a volunteer basis and shall be available to provide animal-assisted  
59 [therapy] activities to individuals during and after traumatic events  
60 within twenty-four hours of receiving notice to do so.

61 (d) Not later than July 1, [2014] 2016, the Commissioner of Children  
62 and Families, in consultation with [the Governor's Prevention  
63 Partnership and] the animal-assisted [therapy] activity community,  
64 shall, within available appropriations, develop [a crisis response  
65 program utilizing the services of the coordinated volunteer canine  
66 crisis response team identified pursuant to subsection (c) of this section  
67 to provide] a protocol to (1) identify and credential animal-assisted  
68 activity organizations and providers of animal-assisted therapy in the  
69 state, and (2) utilize animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted  
70 therapy to provide aid to children and youths living with trauma and  
71 loss.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>from passage</i>	17a-22ee

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

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### ***OFA Fiscal Note***

***State Impact:*** None

***Municipal Impact:*** None

### ***Explanation***

There is no fiscal impact to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to develop protocols to: (1) identify and mobilize animal-assisted (AA) critical incident response teams, and (2) use AA activities and therapy to provide aid to children and youth "living with trauma and loss." The agency is not required to implement these protocols. Further, there is no fiscal impact from extending, from 1/1/14 to 1/1/16, a provision requiring DCF to train "certain" agency employees and mental health care providers on the value of the animal assisted activities.

House Amendment "A" struck the underlying bill and replaced it with similar language. The fiscal impact of the amendment is described above.

### ***The Out Years***

***State Impact:*** None

***Municipal Impact:*** None

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**OLR Bill Analysis****HB 6725 (as amended by House "A")\******AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES.*****SUMMARY:**

This bill makes several changes to the law concerning animal-assisted therapy services, including changes to the definitions in the law's provisions.

The bill requires the children and families (DCF) commissioner, in consultation with the agriculture commissioner and within available appropriations, to develop a protocol to identify and mobilize animal-assisted critical incident response teams statewide, instead of identify a canine crisis response team as required under current law. The bill extends the deadline for this requirement by two years, from January 1, 2014 to January 1, 2016.

It requires the teams to be available to provide animal-assisted activities, not just animal-assisted therapy. As under current law, the teams must operate on a volunteer basis and be available on 24 hours' notice.

The bill also eliminates a requirement that the DCF commissioner, within available appropriations and in collaboration with the Governor's Prevention Partnership and the animal-assisted therapy community, develop a crisis response program using the services of the canine crisis response team. The bill instead requires the commissioner, in consultation with the animal-assisted activity community and within available appropriations, to develop by July 1, 2016 a protocol to identify and credential animal-assisted activity organizations and animal-assisted therapy providers in the state. (The

bill does not specify how DCF will credential the organizations and providers.) This protocol must provide animal-assisted activities and therapy, not just animal-assisted therapy as under current law, for children and youths living with trauma and loss.

Additionally, the bill extends, from January 1, 2014 to January 1, 2016, a requirement that the DCF commissioner, within available appropriations, develop and implement training for certain department employees and healthcare providers on the (1) healing value of the human-animal bond for children, (2) value of therapy animals in dealing with traumatic situations, and (3) benefits of animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy (rather than the benefits of an animal-assisted therapy program, as required by current law).

The bill also makes minor and technical changes.

\*House Amendment "A", which replaces the underlying bill, (1) revises several definitions in the original bill, (2) eliminates a requirement that a therapy team be directly supervised by a mental health professional and instead requires the therapy team to include a licensed therapist, and (3) makes other minor changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

## **DEFINITIONS**

### ***New Definitions***

The bill defines:

1. "animal-assisted activity" as any activity that involves a team consisting of a registered handler and therapy animal interacting with people in Connecticut;
2. "animal-assisted critical incident response team" as a team of registered handlers and therapy animals that (a) has been identified by DCF and (b) can provide animal-assisted activities to individuals during and after traumatic events;

3. a “registered handler” as a person screened, trained, and registered by a national animal therapy organization to engage in animal-assisted activities, provide animal-assisted therapy, or both;
4. a “therapist” as a licensed (1) physician who specializes in psychiatry, (2) psychologist or professional counselor, (3) marital and family therapist, or (4) clinical or master social worker; and
5. a “therapy animal” as any animal trained to comfort people who have (a) experienced mental, physical, or emotional trauma; (b) witnessed, or been a victim of, a violent act; or (c) behavioral health care needs.

### ***Definition Changes***

The law currently defines “animal-assisted therapy community” as the local or regional entities capable of providing animal-assisted therapy to people in Connecticut. The bill changes the term to “animal-assisted activity community” and broadens the definition to include local or regional entities capable of providing animal-assisted activities to such people.

The law also currently defines “animal-assisted activity organization” as an entity involved in training, evaluating, and registering members for the animal-assisted therapy community. The bill broadens the definition to instead include an entity involved in any of these functions for the animal-assisted activity community.

Additionally, the law currently defines “animal-assisted therapy” as goal-directed intervention in which animals are used as an integral part of the crisis response process to aid individuals who have experienced mental, physical, or emotional trauma. The bill specifies that, in addition to the therapy animal, this therapy involves a therapist and may involve a registered handler. The bill also broadens the definition to include therapy for individuals who (1) witnessed or

were victimized by violence or (2) have behavioral health care needs.

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable

Yea 13 Nay 0 (02/19/2015)

Public Health Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 21 Nay 6 (03/23/2015)