



March 25, 2024

**RE: Senate Bill 4342**

Dear Chairperson Latz and Members of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee,

As the advocacy voice of the responsible pet care community, the Pet Advocacy Network represents the interests and expertise of retailers, companion animal suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, pet owners, and others involved in the many aspects of pet care across the United States. Our association promotes animal well-being and responsible pet ownership, fosters environmental stewardship, and ensures healthy pets' availability through our local, state, and federal work.

Therapy dogs are known for their ability to provide comfort, companionship, and emotional support. Numerous studies have shown that interactions with therapy dogs can significantly reduce stress, anxiety, and symptoms of PTSD. For law enforcement officers who regularly encounter high-stress situations and trauma, the presence of therapy dogs can play a crucial role in mitigating the long-term psychological impact of their work.

**We ask that you vote YES on Senate Bill 4342.**

This initiative is a critical step towards addressing the mental health challenges faced by peace officers who are often exposed to traumatic incidents during their service. As the advocacy voice for the broader responsible pet care industry, we work with, and support, therapy animal nonprofits across the country, and have witnessed first-hand the positive impact that therapy dogs can have on individuals experiencing job related stress, trauma, and PTSD. Law enforcement officers, in particular, face unique and demanding challenges that can take a toll on their mental well-being. The introduction of therapy dogs into their work environment can serve as an invaluable tool in supporting their mental health.

This bill not only focuses on the well-being of peace officers but also recognizes the importance of therapy dogs in responding to calls involving persons in crisis. The calming influence of a therapy dog can de-escalate tense situations, creating a safer environment for both officers and the individuals they are assisting.

Furthermore, therapy dogs and animals can bridge gaps in communication and help establish trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. We've already seen the positive impact in community outreach that animals associated with law enforcement has had. In 2019 after the success that Troy, Michigan found when they swore in "Pawfficer Donut"<sup>1</sup> the City of Fort Smith in Arkansas brought in their own department cat, "Pawfficer Fuzz" with the goal of "Bridging Communities with Fur and Friendship."<sup>2</sup>

The proposed grant program is a fiscally responsible and targeted approach to addressing mental health challenges within law enforcement agencies. By providing financial support to non-profit organizations with

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<sup>1</sup>Pawfficer Donut Sworn In, MLive.com, 2018, [https://www.mlive.com/news/2018/05/pawfficer\\_donut\\_sworn-in\\_as\\_th.html](https://www.mlive.com/news/2018/05/pawfficer_donut_sworn-in_as_th.html)

<sup>2</sup> Pawfficer Fuzz, FortSmith.gov, 2018, [www.fortsmithar.gov/government/departments/police-department/about-the-lspd/community-relations/pawfficer-fuzz](http://www.fortsmithar.gov/government/departments/police-department/about-the-lspd/community-relations/pawfficer-fuzz)

1615 Duke Street, Suite 100  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
202.452.1525 | [info@petadvocacy.org](mailto:info@petadvocacy.org)  
Petadvocacy.org



expertise in training and placing therapy dogs, the bill ensures that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively.

In conclusion, we urge the Committee to consider the significant positive impact that therapy dogs can have on the mental well-being of peace officers and their ability to respond to crisis situations.

**We strongly support Senate Bill 4342 and encourage its swift passage** to ensure that our law enforcement agencies have access to the resources they need to address the mental health needs of their officers.

We appreciate your consideration and the opportunity to provide comments and input.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Miller-Hurley  
Vice President of Government Affairs

1615 Duke Street, Suite 100  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
202.452.1525 | [info@petadvocacy.org](mailto:info@petadvocacy.org)  
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