

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE NATIONAL DISTRICT ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION TASK FORCE ON THE USE OF THERAPY ANIMALS IN JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS:

Allie Phillips has chaired the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA) Task Force on the Use of Therapy Animals in Judicial Proceedings. The Task Force supports the inclusion of trained and registered animals that offer therapeutic assistance to crime victims, and the guidelines outlined in the *Therapy Animals Supporting Kids (TASK)TM Manual*, to aid in the investigation of crimes involving young and/or vulnerable victims or witnesses and in situations where the animal would aid in preparing for, or testifying in a hearing or trial.

Further, the NDAA Task Force endorses the following guidelines as best practices for including animals that offer therapeutic assistance in the criminal justice field:

1. The animal should be adequately trained/evaluated, registered/certified, be assessed for skill and aptitude to safely and effectively offer therapeutic assistance, and be a member in good standing of an organization that registers/certifies animals for therapeutic purpose. Animals may be certified to work in other areas along with being registered/certified by an organization for therapeutic purpose.
2. The animal has been trained with one person (handler) to steward the animal when working with crime victims and to advocate for the wellbeing of the animal at all times. The handler has received training from an organization on offering their animal for therapeutic purpose, understands their animal; recognizes when their animal is stressed or tired; and has received additional training from the criminal justice agency on the protocols and policies of the agency, the expected roles of the handler-animal therapy team, and the expected interaction so as not to interfere with the collection of evidence or the effective administration of justice. The handler will abide by agency protocol.
3. The handler-animal team has been trained/assessed for working with crime victims, including maltreated children, and has a proficiency in one or more of these categories:
 - a. As a greeter at an agency;
 - b. As support during a forensic interview or evaluation;
 - c. As support during a medical examination;
 - d. As support during individual or group therapy;
 - e. As support during pre-trial or pre-hearing preparation;
 - f. As support during trial, hearing testimony or depositions.
 - g. As other support area as the agency sees fit including waiting rooms, children's playrooms, reading areas etc.
4. The handler-animal team should be given access beforehand to the specific environment they will be working in (courthouse, prosecutor's office, children's advocacy center, interview rooms, etc.), in order to assess and ensure the comfort level of the handler-animal therapy team in that setting.
5. The handler-animal team will be matched appropriately to the crime victim, agency and/or situation so as to be the most effective.

6. The handler should avoid serving in a dual capacity (e.g. as the sole criminal justice professional and handler at the same time) since the duties of the criminal justice professional may conflict with the primary duty of the handler which, as an animal advocate, is to be solely responsible for the animal at all times. Moreover, this will avoid any potential conflict of interest and clearly identify who the handler is representing should an incident occur.
7. The handler should undergo a criminal background check and must satisfy confidentiality requirements of the agency and state law.
8. The handler-animal team should be covered by a liability insurance policy with limits of not less than \$1,000,000 from the registering/certifying organization or the criminal justice agency.
9. The handler of the animal has the sole responsibility for the humane stewardship of the therapy animal and must function as the animal's advocate at all times.
10. The facility/agency incorporating an animal for therapeutic purpose should have policies in place to ensure safety, risk management, physical and emotional security, health, basic trust and freedom of choice, personal space, appropriate allocation of program resources, appropriate workload, clearly defined roles, confidentiality, communication systems and training for all persons involved. *(This is in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the Prague Declaration of the International Association of Human Animal Interaction Organizations for all persons and organizations involved in animal-assisted activities and/or therapy and all bodies governing the presence of such programs in their facilities).*

These guidelines are not meant to impact or diminish other successful programs that safely include animals assisting crime victims.

Note to the NDAA Board: This resolution was written and reviewed by the NDAA Criminal Justice Therapy Animal Task Force. For information on members and their backgrounds, please contact Allie Phillips: aphillips@ndaa.org.