

February 15, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

Please accept this letter of my support for House File 208 and Senate File 73 to create a Companion Animal Board (CAB) in Minnesota. I am a licensed clinical social worker with over 25 years of experience with the Human-Animal Bond (HAB) and in providing Animal-Assisted Interactions (AAI) for human well-being and mental health. Professionally, I oversee an extensive AAI program at the University of Minnesota; however, my comments are not on behalf of an official University of Minnesota position.

During my professional career as a therapist and researcher, I have created and directed numerous programs that connect people with companion animals for education, mental health therapy, and social support. During one of my programs recently, a student shared, "I never would have imagined that my mental health would have been so impacted by spending time with these pets each week". Furthermore, my research and recent dissertation on the practice of Animal-Assisted Interactions echoes the findings of rigorous, scientific studies that show how companion animals deeply touch people's lives.

At the root level, our companion animals remind us of our humanity. The power of their acceptance and love, no matter who we are or how we feeling, helps to reduce isolation and loneliness and enhance our sense of belonging and community. For so many around the world, their companion animals were the supports they needed during the stress and trauma of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. These amazing creatures – companion animals – save lives. My professional and academic experience has shown me that the citizens in Minnesota need to be empowered and given the resources to advocate for their animals. At the end of the day, while this bill addresses the needs and welfare of companion animals, we humans are entrusted with their care (for better or for worse), so it is up to us to carry out this responsibility with as much integrity as possible.

The creation of CAB would provide an appropriate place in Minnesota state government to address a unique group of animals that are not livestock or wildlife. CAB would consist of Minnesota residents who would have specific expertise in companion animal issues. The board would also have a collaborative approach to this oversight and be able to provide much-needed education and training on companion animals and their well-being.

The welfare of our citizens and the state of Minnesota = the welfare of the companion animals who also live here. I urge you to pass HF 208 and SF 73 to create the Companion Animal Board. This action will demonstrate to the people of Minnesota that you care about a population that can't vote or lobby for your support, but that will be waiting for you when you come home with excited tail wags or loud purrs of appreciation.

Respectfully,

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