

**HOME STUDY GUIDE FOR TMH ANIMAL THERAPY VOLUNTEERS  
PARTICIPATING IN THE COURTHOUSE THERAPY DOGS PROGRAM  
FOR THE SECOND JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**

The Courthouse Therapy Dogs Program for the Second Judicial Circuit is operational in two court divisions: criminal and dependency. The Second Judicial Circuit, State Attorney for the Second Judicial Circuit (criminal program only), Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare (TMH) Animal Therapy Program, Guardian ad Litem Program for the Second Judicial Circuit (dependency court program only) and facility directors for the county courthouses in the Second Judicial Circuit are participating in a program to provide animal therapy services in the criminal courts to victims of violence, ages five and older, who are testifying in court and to children appearing in court in dependency cases.

The Second Judicial Circuit is comprised of Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty and Wakulla Counties. At implementation of this program (August 2007) there was only one other jurisdiction using animal therapy in the courts and that jurisdiction uses service dogs.

In criminal cases victims as witness are sometimes required to wait for an extended period of time before they testify. This wait produces high level of anxiety for some victims, particularly children and others in vulnerable situations. The intent of the program is to have the victim/witness be more comfortable and able to provide more accurate testimony. Animal teams will be used while the victim/witness is waiting to testify, and to the extent possible, be available for the victim/witness at the conclusion of the testimony.

Dependency cases involve matters relating to children (ages birth to 18) who have been abandoned, abused or neglected by parents/custodians; surrendered for adoption or in need of services. In some instances the children are separated from their parents/custodians and these children may be seeing their parents/custodians for the first time since the allegations occurred or since the previous court event. The intent of the program is for children to have positive court experiences. Although there may be separate related criminal cases, the goal of dependency court is not to punish the parents, but to find a permanent, stable and safe home for the children.

The courthouses are extremely busy public buildings with the largest facility having around 900 employees and 2,000 members of the public entering the building daily. While the program participants are eager to have the animal teams available, animal handlers need to be mindful that some other occupants of the building and some members of the public may not share this enthusiasm. Additionally, animal handlers should be aware of the concerns of others that their presence raises, including allergic reactions, other health concerns, animal elimination, parasites and fear. As such, animal handlers should minimize contact with the public and other employees and adhere to all Pet Partners (formerly Delta Society) and TMH Animal Therapy policies regarding grooming, elimination clean-up and parasite control. Also, animal handlers should present themselves as “official” animal therapy teams through use of TMH Animal Therapy/Pet Partners logos on apparel as well as identification badges.

**Program Overview** - The target population for the criminal court program is victims of violent crime, age five and over, providing testimony in court (primarily trials) and depositions, who the state attorney victim advocate feels would benefit from the presence of an animal therapy team. Specific victims will be identified by the state attorney victim advocate. The referring party will make a request of the TMH Animal Therapy program to have an animal team available for a victim/witness. Animal teams will visit with the victim/witness while the victim/witness waits to testify, possibly be with the victim/witness during testimony and to the extent possible, be available for the victim/witness at the conclusion of the testimony. In general the animal team will be present with the victim/witness, however, animals are not allowed in courtrooms or judicial chambers without the approval of the presiding judge. The target population for the dependency court program is all children (ages birth to 18) appearing for any dependency court proceeding. Children (as well as parents/custodians and other court participants) are invited to interact with the animal team in a group setting environment while they wait for their case to be heard. These court events are scheduled well in advance and volunteers sign-up for dependency court visits by email.

**Third Parties** - A third party will be present with the animal team at all times the animal team is with a child victim/witness and will be present or available with adult victims/witnesses. In some of the smaller counties the state attorney may not have the resources to provide a third party for criminal cases. If the state attorney is unable to provide a third party, another TMH Animal Therapy volunteer may serve as the third party. Alternate animal teams are scheduled to serve as third parties or to be available if the primary team is unable to make the visit, or if the scheduled dog is having an off day. In dependency courts, the visits take place in a group setting or a Guardian ad Litem volunteer may be present. In no circumstances should a volunteer team visit without a third party present.

**Application/Background Check** - The animal handler will be required to complete a program participation application. The primary purpose of the application is to secure sufficient information necessary to conduct a background check and to obtain availability information. Background checks will be conducted on all participating animal handlers.

**Confidentiality** - Animal handlers will agree to maintain the confidentiality of all information including, but not limited to, information pertaining to victims/witnesses and their families, whether written or verbal, received through the scope of your interaction with the victims/witnesses. Volunteers are required to sign an oath of confidentiality. There are separate oaths for the criminal court program and the dependency court program.

**Scheduling** – In the criminal courts animal teams will be primarily used for testimony in trials, and trial schedules frequently change. The court generally sets several trials for each trial date available with the anticipation that most of the trials will settle or be continued. Occasionally more than one trial will remain set for a specific date and one will need to be rescheduled to a new date. Therefore, a tentative trial date is set prior to jury selection, and a final trial date is set after jury selection. It should be noted that many trials are canceled after the jury is selected. Therefore, you may be scheduled to assist and actually report to the courthouse/facility only to learn that the defendant plead or the trial was otherwise canceled or rescheduled. Once a firm trial date is set it is still impossible to determine at what specific time a witness will be needed,

although attempts are made to have children testify in the morning. Therefore, your teams' participation during this wait is extremely beneficial to the victim/witness. An alternate team will also be scheduled and placed on standby in the event you are unable to make the visit, or your dog is having a bad day. Since a third party must always be present with the animal team at all times the animal team is with a child victim/witness, the human member of the alternate team may also make the visit to serve as a third party in the event the state attorney is unable to provide a third party. This is more likely to occur in the smaller counties. In the dependency courts, court events are scheduled well in advance and volunteers sign-up for visits via email. Several cases may be set for one specific time, so some court participants may have a lengthy wait for their case to be heard. Unless you are scheduled for a specific case, the visit will last until the last case with children is called or until your animal is fatigued.

**Additional Training** – Volunteer teams are required to undergo additional training on topics including courthouse and courtroom protocol and demeanor, role of the animal therapy team, interacting with children and the emotional impact of volunteering. Shadow visits are not permitted in criminal court visits so the TMH Animal Therapy Program will determine if teams are appropriate for the courts.

**Role of the Animal Therapy Team** – In all cases, testifying in court or talking with a judge is extremely stressful to the one testifying and the party advocating on their behalf (victim advocate, Guardian ad Litem, or parent/custody). Your team's role is to offer comfort and support, and distraction from the nervousness children or victims feel while waiting to testify and immediately after testifying. You play a vital role in helping the child or victim feel more relaxed and able to provide more accurate testimony. Regardless of your professional background, please do not attempt to act as the victim advocate or counselor. Please solicit the assistance of the victim advocate, Guardian ad Litem, or court personnel if you feel the nature of the visit requires counseling or advocacy. **Additionally, it is always inappropriate to offer or agree to meet with the child or victim/witness after the visit is complete. It is not appropriate to form relationships with the children or victims.** While those you visit with, particularly small children may adore your dog and ask for future visits, never agree to the visit. Instead, make polite noncommittal statements, such as, "My dog seems to really like you, so I am glad you like my dog too." Not only are future visits inappropriate, they may also be harmful since you may be a reminder of a bad time in their life. Also, please keep in mind that most of those you visit with have been subjected to some form of abuse and may be more sensitive to perceived abusive actions. Therefore, if you must redirect your dog, please do so in a non-threatening manner.

**Emotional Impact of Volunteering** – Volunteer handlers will be exposed to the explicit details of violent crimes committed against children, including very young children. The most frequent offense is sexual battery, and in most cases the perpetrator is someone the child knows, and is often trusted by the child. Handlers must refrain from any overt displays of emotion.

**Planning for a Visit** – While everyone is looking forward to your visit, please keep in mind that this is an extremely stressful time for the children and their advocates. In all likelihood the victim/witness will have to testify in front of the perpetrator or a child in a dependency case may not want to answer questions about their parents/custodian. The victim advocate or Guardian ad

Litem may be working with several cases at the same time and must be in court during testimony and is not available for anything else. So the best thing you can do is be prepared so that you won't add to the stress level. Also, while we all want to keep our commitments, it is very important for you to **immediately** contact Stephanie Perkins at 850-321-3787 or Susan Wilson at 850-321-4637 if you have any problems, your dog is having an off day, or you are unable to make the visit. There is an alternate team on stand-by that can fill in for you.

### **What to Bring:**

**Pet Partners identification badge** - As with all TMH Animal Therapy visits you are required to wear your Pet Partners identification badge. You will need your badge to gain access into the facility. Also, if you have any TMH Animal Therapy or Pet Partners shirts, bandanas, etc., please use them so that your team will look more "official", however, please note that courtroom protocols prohibit the exhibition of the identification badge, etc., when you are in the presence of a jury.

**Contact Information** – Please bring telephone numbers of the state attorney, victim advocate, TMH Animal Therapy and court administration so that you can immediately contact someone if you have any problems. If you have a cellular telephone, please bring it as well. Contact information is provided at the end of this document.

**Directions and/or Instructions** – If you need directions to the facility or are provided with specific instructions please bring these with you.

**Items for You and Your Animal** - Please bring whatever you need to engage your dog during the visit (treats, toys, water), bags to pick up elimination waste, and food and drink for yourself if you anticipate an extended visit or a lunch break.

**Travel Time:** **It is very important for you to be on time.** Courts start promptly. Late arrivals may be more harmful than not having an animal team. Remember court participants are under tremendous stress and **are counting on you.** Late arrivals exacerbate the stress. Additionally, if you are reporting for a criminal court case, the victim advocate will be in court during some testimony and will not be available to escort you. Estimated **minimal** time needed to drive to each facility if leaving from Leon County Courthouse follows. This time includes 15 minutes for you to walk your dog before the visit. Please allow additional time if your point of departure is further than the Leon County Courthouse, for inclement weather, driving during peak times, to secure parking, bypass construction or if you are unfamiliar with your route.

**Franklin County State Attorney's Office**, 34 Forbes St, Apalachicola – 2 hours and 30 minutes.

**Gadsden County State Attorney's Office**, 1A East Jefferson St, Quincy – 1 hour and 15 minutes

**Jefferson County Courthouse**, Courthouse Circle, Monticello – 1 hour and 10 minutes

**Liberty County Courthouse**, 10818 NW State Rd 20, Bristol – 1 hour and 45 minutes

**Wakulla County Courthouse**, 3056 Crawfordville Hwy, Crawfordville – 1 hour and 15 minutes

**During Your Visit** - During your visit remember that all Pet Partners and TMH Animal Therapy policies and procedures must be followed. Although the visiting location may be cramped and it may seem to be more beneficial to have your animal off lead, it is **NEVER** permissible for your dog to be off lead. Also, please follow procedures regarding elimination clean-up, grooming, no animal costumes, etc. If your animal is having an off day, or if you run into any difficulties that may make you late or unable to make the visit, please immediately notify Stephanie Perkins who can then secure the services of the “stand-by” team. Additionally, while animal teams are free to use restroom facilities, animal teams are currently not allowed in snack bars and not allowed in courtrooms or judicial chambers without the approval of the presiding judge. As the program grows, access in facilities may be expanded. Detailed instructions by county are below in this section. Occasionally, due to facility construction, security issues or other reasons, you may be provided you with different instructions. In these instances, please follow the instructions of court personnel.

**Courthouse/Facility Access/Identification Badges - Animal teams may be required to go through a security station and must present their Pet Partners Identification Badge.** To the extent possible animal handlers should make attempts to present themselves as “official” animal therapy teams through use of TMH Animal Therapy or Pet Partners logos on apparel or identification badges. In criminal cases, a representative of the state attorney’s victim advocate unit will meet the animal team at the appropriate entrance and escort the animal team to the location of the visit (victim advocate’s office, deposition room or courtroom) using the approved route. In dependency cases you will be instructed where to report. During your first dependency court visit at any facility an employee of the court administrator’s office will accompany you and train you on navigating the facility. In all instances, animal teams are prohibited from entering any snack bar (if in building), and are not allowed in the courtrooms or judicial chambers without the approval of the presiding judge. Animal teams are permitted to leave the location of the visit for breaks. While walking through the corridors animal teams should attempt to minimize contact with the public or employees, unless contact is “invited” and does not disrupt the daily business of the courthouse/facility. Note: In all facilities the flooring consists of both carpeted and uncarpeted areas. Additionally, in some facilities due to security issues, you may be required to use elevators while in other counties you may be required to use stairs.

**Franklin County:** Currently visits are limited to the criminal court program. The State Attorney’s Office is located at 34 Forbes Street, Apalachicola, Florida. Animal teams will be required to enter the facility through the front door and enter the State Attorney’s Office (or victim assistance office) located to the right

of the building. If there is a need for the use of a witness room, animal teams will be escorted to the Courthouse Annex by the victim advocate or designee.

**Gadsden County:** Currently visits are limited to the criminal court program. The State Attorney's Office is located at 1A East Jefferson Street, Quincy, Florida. Animal teams will be required to enter the facility through the entry to the State Attorney's Office (or victim assistance office) located at the front of the building. Please do not enter through the back door located in the parking lot. If there is a need for the use of a witness room, animal teams will be escorted to the Courthouse Annex by the victim advocate or designee.

**Jefferson County:** Currently visits are limited to the criminal court program. The Jefferson County Courthouse is located at Courthouse Circle in Monticello, FL. Animal teams are required to go enter the courthouse at the public entrance (located at the south side of the building), go through a security station and must present their Pet Partners Identification Badge. The victim advocate or designee will meet you at the entrance and escort you the victim advocate's office.

**Leon County:** Currently visits are limited to the criminal court program. The Leon County Courthouse is located at 301 S. Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida. Animal teams are required to go through a security station and must present their Pet Partners Identification Badge. In an effort to minimize contact with the public and other courthouse employees, animal teams will be required to enter the courthouse at the Monroe Street Public Entrance. A representative of the state attorney's victim advocate unit will meet the animal team at the Monroe Street entrance and escort the animal team to the victim advocate's office using the employees' elevators, Elevators 3 and 5 or the South Lobby elevators.

**Liberty County:** Currently visits are limited to the criminal court program. The Liberty County Courthouse is located at 10818 NW State Road 20 in Bristol, FL. Animal teams should wait outside at the door on the West side (left side if looking at the front of the building) of the building. The victim advocate or designee will escort you to the victim advocate's office.

**Wakulla County:** The Wakulla County Courthouse is located at 3056 Crawfordville Hwy in Crawfordville, FL. Animal teams are required to go enter the courthouse at the public entrance (located at the rear of the building by the parking lot), go through a security station and must present their Pet Partners Identification Badge. In criminal court cases, the victim advocate or designee will meet you at the entrance and escort you to the victim advocate's office located on the third floor of the courthouse. In dependency court cases, once you have been trained by court administration personnel, you may proceed to the dependency court waiting room (Second Floor) after you have been cleared by the bailiffs at the security station.

**Parking** - Unfortunately funds are not available for public parking lots, metered spaces or parking tickets.

**Franklin County:** Free parking is located in the areas surrounding the courthouse.

**Gadsden County:** Free parking is located in a parking lot behind the State Attorney's Office. If the lot is full spaces are available on the streets surrounding the state attorney's office and the courthouse annex.

**Jefferson County:** Free parking is available in the areas surrounding the courthouse.

**Leon County:** Parking at the Leon County parking garage is closed to the public for security reasons. The City of Tallahassee operates two paid parking garages: Republic (Eastside) Parking Garage located at the corner of College Avenue and Calhoun Street (entrance on Calhoun Street, across the street from the rear of the courthouse) and Klemm Plaza Parking Garage (entrances on Bronough and Duval Streets). Leon County has a paid parking lot at the Leon County Public Library. Additionally, metered parking spaces are available throughout the downtown area, and a free grass parking lot is available at the southwest corner of Pensacola Street and Franklin Boulevard. SunTrust Bank also had a paid parking lot, also operated by Republic, adjacent (north side) to the courthouse on Calhoun Street, however, the cost is about \$15 - \$20 per day. A Downtown Public Parking Guide is attached or may be obtained at:

[http://www.tallahasseedowntown.com/pdfmaps/parking\\_map.pdf](http://www.tallahasseedowntown.com/pdfmaps/parking_map.pdf)

**Liberty County:** Free parking is available in the areas surrounding the courthouse. Free parking is also available at the civic center.

**Wakulla County:** Free parking is available in the areas surrounding the courthouse.

**Reporting Incidents** – In criminal court cases you are responsible for reporting incidents to the state attorney's Victim/Witness Unit if a representative of that office did not witness the incident. In dependency court cases you are responsible for reporting incidents to Susan Wilson. Reportable incidents include injuries to a person (even if it is you) or animal; situations with a high potential that an injury could have occurred either to a person or an animal, even though no one was hurt at the time; situations with a perception of an accident or injury, and damages to property. Incidents should also be reported to Stephanie Perkins, who will report the incident to Pet Partners.

**Contact Information** - The following provides contact information for select program participants:

Questions regarding TMH Animal Therapy may be directed to:

Stephanie Perkins Director, TMH Animal Therapy  
1330 Miccosukee Rd.  
Tallahassee, Florida 32308  
Phone: (850) 321-3787  
E-mail: [comfortpet1@yahoo.com](mailto:comfortpet1@yahoo.com)

Questions regarding the State Attorney Victim Advocate Program may be directed to:

Helene Potlock, Director of Victim/Witness Assistance Program  
Second Judicial Circuit  
Office of the State Attorney  
301 S. Monroe St., Rm 443E  
Tallahassee, Florida 32301  
Phone: 850-606-6113  
Fax: 850-606-6008  
E-mail: [PotlockH@leoncountyfl.gov](mailto:PotlockH@leoncountyfl.gov)

Franklin and Wakulla Counties:  
Christina Bertera: 850-926-0914

Gadsden and Liberty Counties  
Lauren Tomberlin: 850-627-9647

Jefferson County  
Holly Francis: 850-606-6114

Questions regarding the animal therapy program in the courts may be directed to:

Susan Wilson, Director of Research and Data  
Second Judicial Circuit  
301 S. Monroe St, Rm 225  
Phone: 850-577-4430  
Fax: 850-487-7947  
E-mail: [susanw@leoncountyfl.gov](mailto:susanw@leoncountyfl.gov)