

PROCEDURES FOR ANIMAL THERAPY IN CASE SPECIFIC DEPENDENCY COURT EVENTS

1. Approval of Presiding Judge – Prior approval by the presiding judge/magistrate/hearing officer of the use of an animal therapy team, including the timing of the use of an animal therapy team, is required if the therapy team will be present in the courtroom. The requesting party is responsible for obtaining approval to the presiding judge/magistrate/hearing officer. The timing of a team's entering and exiting the courtroom is important to minimize disruptions to the court proceedings. If the animal therapy team will not be present in the courtroom prior approval of the judge/magistrate/hearing officer is not required.

2. Requesting an Animal Therapy Team – Requests for an animal therapy team may be by email or telephone to Susan Wilson with the Office of Court Administration at susanw@leoncountyfl.gov or 850-577-4430. Requests should include the:

- Name of the person who will greet the volunteer handler (such as a GAL/DCF staff or volunteer)
- Date and time the team is needed
- Approximate length of time team is needed
- Location of the animal therapy visit (courtroom, chambers, child friendly room, etc.)
- Age and gender of the child(ren) involved
- Any other information that may be useful in selecting the most appropriate animal therapy team.

Attempts will be made to honor requests for a specific team or team attributes (e.g., size of dog); however, special requests cannot be guaranteed.

3. Confirmation of Team Availability – Once a volunteer animal therapy team is scheduled Court Administration will send an email to the presiding judge/magistrate/hearing officer, court administration family court manager, requesting party, bailiffs' unit, and assigned bailiff (if known) with information regarding the handler's name, dog breed, and the date, time and location of the animal therapy visit. Court administration will also inform the handler of the name of the person that will be greeting them and facilitating the animal therapy visit.

4. Courtroom/Chambers Protocols – The party requesting an animal therapy team is responsible for identifying a person who will greet the animal therapy team, introduce the animal therapy team to the child and coordinate the timing of the animal therapy team's entrance and exiting of the courtroom/chambers in accordance with the preference of the presiding judge, magistrate, or hearing officer. If practical the animal therapy team and the child should be

introduced outside the courtroom/chambers to ensure that the child will benefit from the presence of the animal therapy team. This is especially beneficial if it is not known if the child likes dogs in general, or will bond with the specific dog used for the visit. Due to animal fatigue, multiple teams may be used for lengthy court events. Generally, due to the limited number of volunteers, only two teams will be available per day, a morning team and an afternoon team.

5. Presence of Third Party – The party requesting an animal therapy team is responsible for ensuring that a third party is present when an animal therapy team is with a child. Under no circumstances shall a child be left alone with an animal therapy team. The sole role of a handler is to be an advocate for their pet partner and be constantly observing signs of stress or fatigue in the animal. If the animal is overly stressed or fatigued, the animal therapy team may need to end the visit.

6. General Information about Animal Therapy Teams – The Animal Therapy Program uses only volunteer animal therapy teams from the Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare Animal Therapy Program. These volunteer teams must meet all the requirements of Pet Partners (the entity that registers and insures the animal therapy teams), TMH Animal Therapy and the Second Judicial Circuit Animal Therapy Program. Team requirements include extensive training and passing an evaluation, while animal pass a health screening that includes vaccinations and parasite control; and handlers are drug and TB tested, background checked, evaluated on a home study guide and court protocols, and required to sign an oath of confidentiality.