



Bridgewater State University Parental Consent Form

Title of Research: Expansion of the Plymouth County Comfort Dog Program Outcome Study

Researchers: Leslie J. Sattler, Ph.D., LICSW; Robert McMackin, Ed.D; Chloe Wojtowicz, MSW

You are being asked permission for your child to participate in research. To make an informed decision about whether you want your child to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your child's personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked if you want your child to **opt out** of this study.

If you *do not* want your child to participate, return this [form](#) to Assistant Superintendent, Marybeth Brust by December 15, 2025.

If you agree to your child's participation in this study, nothing else is required of you at this time.

Explanation of Study

Your child attends a school, group, or organization where the Plymouth County Comfort Dog Program (PCCDP) provides services. The Comfort Dog Program is sponsored by the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office and your community's police department. A comfort dog is a type of animal assisted intervention that promote well-being, enhance resiliency and provide comfort to people who have had difficult life experiences. This program has a police department resource officer visit your child's school, group, or organization with a comfort dog.

The Plymouth County District Attorney's Office partnered with a research team at Bridgewater State University School of Social Work to study the effectiveness of services provided by the PCCDP. Services provided by the PCCDP includes handler/dog teams being present during socio-emotional and behavioral groups, instructing drug prevention classes, providing weekly check-ins with individual students, being present in classrooms, supporting students experiencing emotional upset, and providing comfort after crisis situations. We seek your permission to gather data from your child regarding their participation in services provided by the PCCDP.

If you agree to allow your child to participate, your child will be asked questions about their experience of the PCCDP services they received. Such questions may include their satisfaction with the service, their overall reaction to the services, and their feelings or behaviors before and after the service.

Your child's participation in the study will last the 2025-2026 school year.

Risks and Discomforts

No risks or discomforts are anticipated for your child from answering questions about their involvement in interactions with the Comfort Dog Program handler/dog teams. Each handler and dog involved in the PCCDP undergo rigorous training in human and dog behavior and receive certification as a Comfort Dog Team. Despite this training, however, your child may experience discomfort in their interactions with the handler/dog teams or

other children involved in the interaction. To reduce the likelihood of such discomfort, all interactions will be closely monitored by handlers and steps will be taken to minimize any potential harm to your child.

Benefits

This study is important because it is the first of its kind examining the socio-emotional benefits of using Comfort Dog Teams to enhance resilience and well-being in those affected by environmental stressors (e.g., mental health, opiate crisis, crime). Results of research will inform continued expansion of the services provided by the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office Comfort Dog Program and may then support application for grant funding aimed to expand the program in the community. In addition, your child may benefit through their interactions with the handler/dog teams via enhanced resilience and well-being.

Confidentiality and Records

Your child's study information will be kept confidential by not including your child's name or other identifying information on study materials. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your child's study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Local, State, and Federal agencies, for example the Plymouth County DA who is requesting this study; school administration, Department of Child and Family Services, and Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to investigate cases of harm, abuse or neglect and protect human subjects in research.

* Representatives of Bridgewater State University, including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at BSU

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact *Leslie J. Sattler, Ph.D., LICSW* by email at lsattler@bridgew.edu or by phone 508-531-2518 .

If you have any questions regarding your child's rights as a research participant, please contact The Institutional Review Board, Bridgewater State University, (508) 531-1242.