Talking Points for Introducing the Concept of Therapy Animals

Your Goal:
To build relationships while educating your lawmaker and their staff about what a therapy animal is, and what it isn’t.

Introduce yourself and all your roles.
• You’re an advocate of the human-animal bond.
• Are you also a handler? If so, tell them a little about your animal – showing a favorite photo or sharing a trading card is a nice touch, if you don’t or can’t have your animal with you.
• Have you or a family member received a therapy animal visit? Briefly share the experience and its impact.
• You’re a voter. How long have you lived in this legislator’s district?

Share these key points.
• Many people confuse therapy animals with service animals or emotional support animals, but they aren’t the same.
• Therapy animals are beloved pets who visit many people who may benefit from that interaction.
• Assistance animals, like service dogs, and emotional support animals are animals who primarily benefit just one person.
• Not every animal can be a therapy animal. Quality programs, like Pet Partners, have high standards to ensure safety as well as animal welfare.
• There is a growing body of research that shows that therapy animals really can make a difference. This can include things like reduce fear before treatments, decrease anxiety, lower perceived pain and shorten recovery times. The presence of therapy animals can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation and even influence a positive outlook during cancer care.

Make the ‘ask.’
• If legislation is introduced that involves therapy animals, I’d ask that you please make sure the language used is accurate and that references to therapy animals align with accepted standards for client safety and animal welfare.

Why is this important?
• While all these animals can benefit people, when therapy animal, service animal and emotional support animal are confused or conflated, legislation can unintentionally impact the wrong type of people and animals.

Close strong.
• Thank you for making time in your schedule to meet with me.
• I’m available if you have any future questions about therapy animals and the standards they should meet to keep everyone safe.
• Be sure to hand them a leave behind with your contact information on it.