

March 21, 2023

Annette A. Bennett, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Appomattox County Public Schools

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Bennett:

I'm writing from [TeachKind](#), PETA's humane education division, which works with thousands of educators throughout the U.S. to bring compassion into the curriculum. We saw a [report](#) out of Appomattox County that a juvenile is facing charges after allegedly shooting eight horses, killing five and injuring three. In light of this disturbing alleged incident, we urge you to equip your staff members with the tools they need to address students' aggressive actions, foster prosocial behavior throughout the entire student population, and help prevent further incidents of cruelty. To that end, we're offering our free resources—including [Empathy Now](#), **our step-by-step trauma-informed guide to addressing and preventing youth violence against animals**.

**As mental-health and law-enforcement experts well know, [cruelty to animals](#) and violence against humans are inextricably linked.** Many educators are aware that serial killers and school shooters—including [Salvador Ramos](#), [Payton Gendron](#), [Nikolas Cruz](#), and [Ethan Crumbley](#)—tend to have a history of cruelty to animals, and [Sandy Hook Promise](#) has cruelty to animals on its list of "[10 Critical Warning Signs of Violence](#)." It's also common for young people to have witnessed the abuse of animals, which can be a [form of trauma](#), and children who have observed acts of cruelty to animals are more likely to abuse animals themselves.

It's vital that schools set a standard of compassion. Fostering empathy for animals throughout the curriculum is easy, and [research suggests that it can help students academically](#). It would also help your district meet the requirements of [Virginia's character education law](#), which include teaching character traits like kindness, empathy, and compassion. Existing programming can be bolstered by incorporating [humane education](#) into your schools' curricula, which would allow you to reach susceptible kids before they engage in violent behavior.

At TeachKind, we're [former teachers](#) who support school leaders in a variety of ways to help them simultaneously develop students' academic skills and empathy for others. We're sending you our free [Share the World](#) curriculum. It's the perfect tool for teaching young students the Golden Rule and the importance of compassion and empathy. We're also sending you [Challenging Assumptions](#), our free secondary school curriculum designed to encourage empathy toward others. Our staff is on standby to provide you and your teachers with additional materials and even host virtual presentations for your students—all free of charge. We'd also be happy to work directly with teachers in your district.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters who live in Virginia, thank you for your consideration of this important matter. May I please hear from you as soon as possible?

Sincerely,

Andrew Burton  
TeachKind Assistant

cc: Cheryl Servis, Ed.D., Director of Curriculum & Instruction & CTE ([REDACTED])

