TeachKind
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April 3, 2026

Brad Hatch
Superintendent
Altoona Area School District

Via email: [redacted]

Dear Superintendent Hatch:

I'm writing from TeachKind, which works with thousands of schools nationwide to integrate compassion for animals into the learning experience. We saw recent disturbing reports out of Pennsylvania describing a 17-year-old from Altoona who is facing cruelty to animals charges for reportedly violently beating a dog. According to law enforcement statements, the attack was so severe that the dog, named Bailey, required emergency veterinary care. Reportedly, in addition to appearing to be emaciated at the time of the alleged attack, Bailey's veterinary team determined she had allegedly been tied by her hind legs following an apparent failed strangulation attempt. She was reportedly struck in the skull with a baseball bat, resulting in a fracture, then hit again with a pickaxe, and subsequently had her head slammed into concrete. Reports also indicate that another dog in the home was found deceased in a box, with the apparent cause being starvation and neglect.

Whether or not the teenager involved attends Altoona Area Schools, incidents like this understandably raise serious concerns for children, families, and educators. Many people have expressed their fears of future violence, and students may already be aware of the news as well. TeachKind is dedicated to providing free resources and support to help them process such information and assist leaders like you in preventing potential hostility and aggression.

With numerous comparable cases happening at an alarming rate, your district is not alone, emphasizing the urgent need to promote prosocial behavior and inhibit acts of cruelty to animals. Incidents like this are deeply troubling for the individuals directly involved, and they can also signal broader risks to community safety. As mental health and law enforcement experts widely recognize, **cruelty to animals and violence against humans are inextricably linked**—a connection documented by researchers and reflected in national violence prevention frameworks, including Sandy Hook Promise's list of "10 Critical Warning Signs of Violence."

Fortunately, this link works both ways: A study on the connection between violence against animals and violence against humans concluded, "**Teaching children to be more humane, compassionate, and respectful towards living beings can help reduce all types of violence**." Not only that, but research indicates that humane education can help students academically as well, and doing so would help you comply with Pennsylvania's statute that mandates humane education to be provided "[t]o all pupils up to and including the fourth grade."

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To support this important work, **we're sending you Empathy Now, our step-by-step guide for schools to address and prevent youth violence against animals.** This research-based tool was developed with trauma-informed principles at its core as a direct response to frequent similar instances that have occurred nationwide. We're also sending a copy of our standards-aligned Elementary and Secondary school programs, which are designed to encourage empathy and compassion. Additionally, we're including a selection of books about kindness toward animals and a set of our Empathy for All posters for schools to display.

Our team comprises former classroom teachers who understand the realities of today's schools. We would be happy to send additional copies of our resources for students and staff district-wide and would love to meet to discuss how we can support your community, curriculum, and educator needs.

On behalf of PETA and our many members and supporters in Pennsylvania, thank you for your leadership and for considering this important opportunity to support students and strengthen your district's commitment to empathy and safety. I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Sincerely,

Julie Everett
Senior Writer and Engagement Coordinator
TeachKind | PETA's Humane Education Division

Cc: Mark Harrington, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education ([redacted])
Haley Fleegle, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction & Elementary Programs ([redacted])