

## **FACULTY RESEARCH FUND**

**Award Date:** Spring 2017

**Proposal Title:** Effects of support dogs on eyewitness testimony

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## Abstract

Testifying in court can be a highly stressful event. To alleviate this stress, a number of different methods have been attempted with vulnerable populations such as children. One newer approach has been to provide the witness with a support dog, based on research that shows pets have a calming effect on individuals. In many jurisdictions, the use of a support animal is restricted to child witnesses; however, it may be that even adult witnesses could benefit from the presence of a support dog. The current proposal seeks to examine the effects a support dog may have on adult eyewitness anxiety while providing testimony in court. A pilot study will be performed in which participants are shown a video of a mock crime. One week later, the participants will be questioned by both prosecuting and defense attorneys in a mock courtroom setting to simulate the stress associated with actual witness testimony. Halfway through the cross-examination of the witness by the defense attorney, the support dog will be introduced. Participants' anxiety will be measured remotely using a wrist heart rate monitor, as well as through self report collected after the procedure. It is predicted that participants' anxiety will gradually increase during the proceedings compared to baseline, culminating in the highest anxiety during cross-examination (the most adversarial part of witness questioning). Based on previous research by the principle investigator, it is further predicted that the introduction of the support dog will act to decrease the participants' anxiety nearly back to baseline levels. To accomplish this research, funding is requested to build the mock courtroom, provide payment for the handlers who will provide and supervise the support dog, and to cover costs of attending a regional conference to present the results.