
OLR Bill Analysis

SB 427

AN ACT CONCERNING POLICE ANIMALS AND DOGS IN VOLUNTEER CANINE SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAMS.

SUMMARY

This bill makes several changes affecting animals that assist certain public safety organizations. Primarily, the bill does the following:

1. increases the criminal penalty for intentionally injuring a peace officer's animal or a volunteer canine search and rescue team's dog and makes it a crime to harass a peace officer's dog when it is on duty and in a motor vehicle,
2. allows emergency medical services (EMS) personnel to give emergency treatment to an injured peace officer's animal and transport the animal to a veterinarian facility, and
3. creates a grant program to provide body armor to dogs in law enforcement units.

The bill also makes technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage, except for the dog body armor grant program provisions, which take effect July 1, 2024, and the criminal penalty provisions, which take effect October 1, 2024.

§ 1 — CRIMINAL PENALTIES FOR INJURING, KILLING, OR HARASSING PUBLIC SAFETY ANIMALS

The bill increases the criminal penalty for intentionally injuring a peace officer's animal or a volunteer canine search and rescue team's dog while the animal is on duty and under supervision. Specifically, the bill raises the penalty from a class D felony to a class C felony, which increases the (1) maximum prison term from five to 10 years and (2) maximum fine from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

The bill also formally classifies the intentional killing of these animals as a class C felony. Under current law, this crime is an unclassified felony with the same maximum imprisonment and fine as a class C felony (i.e., up to 10 years imprisonment, up to a \$10,000 fine, or both).

Additionally, the bill makes it a class D misdemeanor to intentionally annoy, tease, torment, or otherwise harass a peace officer's animal when it is confined in a motor vehicle while on duty and under an officer's supervision. A class D misdemeanor is punishable by up to 30 days in prison, a fine of up to \$250, or both.

By law, in addition to any sentence for intentionally injuring or killing these animals, the court must also issue an order prohibiting the convicted person from, among other things, owning, living with, or working with animals for five years after conviction or release from prison, whichever is later. The bill also applies this sentencing requirement to convictions for harassing a peace officer's animal.

§§ 2 & 3 — EMS PERSONNEL TREATING AND TRANSPORTING PEACE OFFICERS' ANIMALS

Under the bill, the Department of Public Health (DPH) must adopt regulations by July 1, 2025, on the emergency treatment of peace officers' animals. Specifically, the regulations must cover the following:

1. training emergency services personnel in basic first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and life-saving interventions for the animals;
2. safe handling procedures for the animals;
3. identifying veterinary facilities that provide emergency treatment for them; and
4. decontaminating and sterilizing equipment and vehicles after transporting them.

Beginning July 1, 2025, the bill allows EMS personnel to provide emergency treatment to a peace officer's animal that is injured while it is on duty and under an officer's supervision. It also allows EMS

personnel to transport the injured animal by ambulance to a veterinary facility equipped to provide it with emergency treatment consistent with the DPH regulations. However, the bill prohibits the EMS personnel from treating or transporting the animal if it would inhibit their ability to provide emergency medical attention or transport to a person requiring their services.

The bill also specifies that an EMS personnel's treatment of a peace officer's animal is not the practice of veterinary medicine. (Under existing law, practicing veterinary medicine requires licensure.)

§ 4 — DOG BODY ARMOR GRANT PROGRAM

The bill requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection to administer, within available appropriations, a grant program to provide body armor for dogs in law enforcement units. The bill limits grant eligibility to units that use dogs to do law enforcement duties as part of a statewide or municipal canine unit. By October 1, 2024, the department must post a description of the grant program, including the eligibility criteria and application process, in a conspicuous place on its website. Grants must be made starting in FY 25 and annually afterwards.

BACKGROUND

Definitions

By law, the following people are designated "peace officers": state and local police, Division of Criminal Justice inspectors, state marshals exercising statutory powers, judicial marshals performing their duties, conservation or special conservation officers, constables who perform criminal law enforcement duties, appointed special policemen, adult probation officers, Department of Correction officials authorized to make arrests in a correctional institution or facility, investigators in the State Treasurer's Office, motor vehicle inspectors in the Department of Motor Vehicles who have received Police Officer Standards and Training Council certification, U.S. marshals and deputy marshals, U.S. special agents authorized to enforce federal food and drug laws, and certified police officers of a law enforcement unit created and governed under a state-tribal memorandum (CGS § 53a-3(9)).

A “volunteer canine search and rescue team” is a person and a dog (1) appropriately trained and certified to do search and rescue operations by a nonprofit canine search and rescue organization that is a member of the National Association of Search and Rescue or its successor organization and (2) who jointly work at the request of a police or fire department without compensation (CGS § 5-249(d)).

“Emergency medical services personnel” is a certified emergency medical responder, emergency medical technician, advanced emergency medical technician, emergency medical services instructor, or a licensed paramedic (CGS § 20-206jj(5)).

Related Bill

SB 339 (File 217), reported favorably by the Public Safety and Security Committee, requires anyone convicted of intentionally injuring or killing a peace officer’s animal or a volunteer canine search and rescue team’s dog to pay restitution to the animal’s owner.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Judiciary Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 37 Nay 0 (03/26/2024)