

Judiciary Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-427

AN ACT CONCERNING POLICE ANIMALS AND DOGS IN VOLUNTEER

Title: CANINE SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAMS.

Vote Date: 3/26/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/20/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Judiciary Committee

COSPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Nuccio, 53rd Dist.

Rep. Cheeseman, 37th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to increase the penalty for intentionally injuring police dogs or dogs in volunteer canine search and rescue teams, assigning a penalty to teasing police dogs in a vehicle, allowing medical treatment to an injured dog, and establishing a grant program to provide officers with body armor. A police dog's job is to be loyal and protect their handler, as well as tracking down suspected criminals. Because police officers are often in dangerous situations, this also puts the canine in danger. It is believed that increasing the penalty for purposely injuring or killing a police dog or dogs in volunteer canine search and rescue teams will result in less intentional attacks, protecting the dogs and their handlers.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Benedict R. Daigle, Assistant Public Defender, Office of Chief Public Defender: He testified in opposition to section 1 because of its disproportionate penalties, broadness of language and anticipated racial and ethnic disparities. He took no position on the remainder of the bill. He stated that subsection (d) of section 1 implies that injuring a police dog would be categorized at the same level as killing a police dog, resulting as inequitable and disproportionate. He also stated that subsection (e) of section 1 would create a new crime, and the language used is broad and undefined, creating a risk of overcharging; this would greatly affect communities of color regarding the ongoing issue of over-policing communities of color.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Marie Cetti, K9 Officer, City of Bridgeport, Treasurer, Council 4 AFSCME: She testified in strong support of this bill. She handled a police K9 for eight years and stated that K9 dogs protect their handlers in dangerous situations and many dogs gave up their lives to save their handlers'. In 2023, 25 K9's were killed on duty across the country, including Connecticut's own Broko. Police dogs are very expensive, with the average cost of a police dog around \$100,000 including buying the dog, veterinary bills, equipment, patrol car, and training. She believes that protecting dogs from intentional harm or death would save police departments and handlers financially.

Stacy Ober, Manager, New England - American Kennel Club (AKC): She testified in support of this bill, stating that the AKC is a trusted expert in canine health, breeding, and training, and promotes responsible dog ownership. She stated that this bill would ensure the safety of police dogs. In 2021, Massachusetts and Rhode Island enacted bills authorizing emergency treatment and transport for injured K9 officers and the AKC believes that this treatment should be extended to K9 dogs as well.

Additional Testimony:

Testimony was offered by the following people in support of the protection of police dogs and volunteer canine search and rescue dogs:

Collen Boyle

Neal Goodwin

Julie Jussaume

Lori Riley

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Molly Arabolos, President, Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (CCDLA): She testified on behalf of CCDLA in opposition to section 1 of the bill. The CCDLA asked for subsections (d) and (e) to be removed from the bill. Subsection (d) of section 1 equates the punishment of intentional injury of a police animal or dog in a volunteer canine search and rescue team with causing death of a police dog. Subsection (e) of Section 1 used vague and broad language. She offered an example of if a teenager would face arrest and prosecution for tapping on the window of a police vehicle.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Council, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT): She testified in opposition to this bill. Under current Connecticut law, intentional injury or death to police or search and rescue dogs is considered a class D felony, which is at least one year and at most 5 years' incarceration. By increasing the felony to a class C felony (up to 10 years' incarceration), it will contribute to the issue of mass incarceration. According to the ACLU-CT, there is no evidence that longer sentences will result in public safety. The ACLU's mission is to end mass incarceration and reduce the number of people entering the legal system and she believes this bill does the opposite.

Reported by: Ajax Nanos

Date: 4-1-24