

DYLAN BEHLER
Legislative District 30A
Anne Arundel County



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 154
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3045
800-492-7122 Ext. 3045
Dylan.Behler@house.maryland.gov

Environment and Transportation
Committee

Subcommittees

Agriculture and Aquaculture

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Environment

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 19, 2026

**Testimony in Favor of HB0563
Criminal Law – Emergency Response Animal – Prohibited Actions Against**

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice-Chair Davis, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I respectfully request a favorable report of House Bill 563 to clarify the definitions and penalties for intentionally harassing, interfering with, injuring, killing or causing serious physical injury to an emergency response animal.

Our emergency response animals are critical partners in our State's emergency response work. These animals are highly trained professionals that perform vital tasks like finding missing people, detecting explosives, and protecting officers and civilians when they are in dangerous situations – and because of that, public safety in some cases can depend on them. If such animals are distracted or injured, a missing person may not be found in time, disaster survivors could be missed, or a suspect may escape.

Today you will hear examples regarding the critical nature of the work that law enforcement and search and rescue animals provide – and also some specific instances of occurrences that exemplify the need for this bill to provide a more comprehensive approach to their protection.

More specifically, to better protect our emergency response animals this legislation would:

1. Repeal the current felonious prohibition on the intentional infliction of "bodily harm, permanent disability, or death on an animal owned or used by a law enforcement unit" – and instead,
2. Expand the definition to also include not just law enforcement animals but also search and rescue dogs trained or directed by government to locate individuals;
3. Create new misdemeanors for the intentional harassment or interference with an emergency response animal during the course of their duty, for the intentional injuring of an emergency response animal; for the intentional killing or infliction of serious physical injury to an emergency response animal.
4. Create a new misdemeanor if an individual intentionally injures, harasses, or interferes with an emergency response animal during the commission of a crime.

Once again, I respectfully request a favorable report of House Bill 563 to provide a more comprehensive approach to the protection of our emergency response animals for the vital partnership and role they provide.