



Western Maryland K-9 Search and Rescue, Inc.

Quality • Focus • Teamwork

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February 19, 2026

The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
101 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB 563 – Criminal Law – Emergency Response Animal – Prohibited Actions Against

Dear Chair Bartlett:

My name is Richard Smith. I am the Operational Team Leader for Western Maryland K-9 Search and Rescue. I am writing this letter in support with amendments of House Bill 563 regarding the crimes and penalties for various acts against both law enforcement and search and rescue animals.

On page 4, in line 5 of the bill I would like to ask you to consider adding horses to be used in Search and Rescue operations, matching those for Law Enforcement equine teams. There are two teams in Maryland that utilize equine resources when requested.

Thank you for your consideration of the matters addressed in your legislation to include search and rescue team animals. You may be aware, we are volunteer organizations. We purchase and maintain our own animals to include veterinary expenses. To train a dog from start to initial certification averages 18 to 36 months. Seminars and training are usually out of the handler's pocket as well as travel and lodging costs.

If I can provide any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Richard C. Smith, Sr., M.S.
Team Leader
Western Maryland K-9 Search and Rescue
NASAR Canine Lead Evaluator - Trailing, Human Remains Detection – Land

cc: Members, House Judiciary Committee