



# Maryland Chiefs of Police Association

## Maryland Sheriffs' Association



### MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Sandy Bartlett, Chair and  
Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Darren Popkin, Executive Director, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee  
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee  
Samira Jackson, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

DATE: February 19, 2026

RE: **HB 563 - Criminal Law - Emergency Response Animal - Prohibited Actions Against**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) **SUPPORT HB 563**. This bill updates Maryland law to strengthen protections for law enforcement animals who serve alongside officers every day. As reflected in the bill, new language is added to clearly recognize the serious harm caused when individuals intentionally injure, interfere with, or endanger law enforcement animals in the performance of their duties.

Law enforcement animals are trusted partners in public safety operations, including tracking, apprehension, detection, and search and rescue. These animals place themselves in harm's way to protect officers and the public, often in high risk and unpredictable situations. HB 563 appropriately acknowledges their role by ensuring that intentional acts against them are treated with the seriousness they deserve.

From a law enforcement perspective, these animals are not equipment or tools, they are members of the law enforcement agency just as much as the human officers they serve beside. When a law enforcement animal is harmed, the impact extends beyond operational effectiveness and officer safety. It is the loss or injury of a trusted partner who has trained, served, and protected alongside their handler. HB 563 properly recognizes that reality and reinforces the respect and protection these animals deserve. For these reasons, MCPA and MSA **SUPPORT HB 563** and respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE** report.