



**State Law Enforcement
Officers Labor Alliance**
542 Ritchie Highway
Severna Park, Maryland 21146



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 –
SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Bartlett:

The State Law Enforcement Labor Alliance (SLEOLA) is the exclusive representative for 1,757 active state law enforcement officers, including the following agencies:

- Maryland State Police
- Maryland Natural Resources Police
- Field Enforcement Bureau
- Maryland State Fire Marshall
- Maryland Capitol Police
- Department of Health Police
- Maryland Vehicle Administration Police
- Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services Intelligence and Investigative Division
- Warrant Apprehension Unit of the Division of Parole and Probation in the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

House Bill 563 defines emergency response animal, including search and rescue dogs, and clarifies the penalties for acts against both law enforcement and search and rescue animals. SLEOLA supports this proposal as it affords specific protections to animals that face the same risks as law enforcement officers do and are often the first ones sent into a dangerous situation as they protect their human officer and people in the community they serve.

Maryland state law enforcement agencies use highly trained police dogs for detection (narcotics, explosives, cell phones), tracking, apprehension, and locating missing persons, with the Maryland State Police (MSP) and Department of Public Safety & Correctional Services (DPSCS) having significant units, employing breeds like Belgian Malinois, Dutch Shepherds, and Labrador Retrievers for their drive and trainability. These emergency support animals support state, local, and federal agencies, requiring special licensing and serving roles from correctional facility security to roadside interdictions.

There are numerous examples of individuals that intentionally harass, interfere with, or harm an emergency response animal during the lawful performance of the emergency response animal's duties. Those examples include:

- Maryland State Police Explosive Detection K-9 was struck intentionally, slapped on the side of their body by an intoxicated subject while performing duties at a Baltimore Ravens game.
- Maryland State Police Explosive Detection K-9 was harassed with beer cans being thrown at the K-9 and handler while performing duties at a Baltimore Ravens game.
- Maryland State Police CDS Detection - Patrol/Utility K-9 was severely injured during a vehicle collision where the at-fault driver was driving under the influence of CDS and struck a marked State Police K-9 vehicle. The K-9 was required to be humanely euthanized due to non-recoverable injuries sustained in the vehicle collision.
- Maryland State Police Patrol K-9 was kicked during a large-scale protest at UMES.
- Garrett County Sheriff's Office K-9 was stabbed and killed by two burglary suspects.
- Montgomery County Police K-9 was shot and killed by a robbery suspect.
- Prince Georges County Police K-9 was stabbed and killed by a burglary suspect.
- Baltimore City K-9 was shot and killed by a burglary suspect.

In October 2025 the Howard County Police Department received a donation of bullet and stabbing proof armor from a nonprofit specializing in providing assistance for dogs in law enforcement. While Howard County's eight German Shepherd and Belgian Malinois K-9 team wore body armor before, the new vests provide enhanced protection, specifically for stabbing. These dogs have body armor because they are in harm's way.

The State Law Enforcement Labor Alliance would like to thank Delegate Behler and Delegate Cardin for proposing this bill and ask the Committee for a favorable report for this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Brian Gill
President

cc: Members, House Judiciary Committee