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Anne Arundel County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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Senate Bill 360

Criminal Law – Emergency Response Animal – Prohibited Actions Against

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and Committee Members

For the record, I am Shaneka Henson, representing District 30 in Anne Arundel County and member of the JPR Committee.

I am here today to urge a favorable report on SB 360 Criminal Law – Emergency Response Animal – Prohibited Actions Against.

This bill before you present definitions and penalties for intentionally harassing, interfering with, injuring, killing, or causing serious physical injury to those animals used by law enforcement and rescuers to provide emergency response services. Current law provides only one sentence to protect these highly trained animals.

In this bill, “Emergency Response Animals” are defined as, and include:

- Dogs used by and trained for law enforcement work.
- Horses used for law enforcement work; and
- Search and rescue dogs trained for and engaged in efforts to locate, or rescue lost, injured, or deceased individuals!

Today you will hear examples of situations regarding the critical nature of the work that law enforcement animals and search and rescue animals provide. These animals regularly find themselves in harm’s way, as do their handlers.

We need to protect law-enforcement and search-and-rescue (SAR) animals from harassment, interference, injury, or death for several important reasons—practical, ethical, and public-safety related.

When they are working as first responders and on duty.....

These animals are not PETS! They are highly trained professionals performing critical tasks such as:

- Finding missing people (children, disaster victims, hikers)
- Tracking suspects
- Detecting explosives, drugs, or human remains
- Protecting officers and civilians in dangerous situations

Interfering with them is essentially interfering with emergency services.

Public safety depends on emergency response animals being highly trained.

If a search and rescue (SAR) animal is distracted or injured:

- A lost person may not be found in time.
- Survivors in disasters could be missed.
- Dangerous suspects might escape.

Harassing or harming a working animal can directly put human lives at risk.

Emergency Response Animals cannot advocate for themselves!

They do not understand intentional harassment, crowd behavior, or malicious intent. Legal protection must exist because:

- These animals are vulnerable while focused on a task.
- They rely on humans and the law to protect them.
- They cannot consent to interference or defend themselves appropriately without escalating danger.

Training for an emergency response animal represents a major investment, and requires:

- Years of instruction
- Significant public funding
- Skilled handlers

Injuring or killing a working animal is not just cruelty—it is the loss of a critical public resource.

Ethical responsibilities to protect service animals represents a strong moral argument.

- We intentionally place these animals in dangerous situations to help humans, and
- Because we rely on them, we have a duty to protect them from unnecessary harm.

Protecting emergency response animals also protects handlers.

If an animal is harmed or distracted:

- The handler may be injured or killed.
- A situation can escalate quickly and unpredictably.

Safeguarding an emergency response animal helps safeguard the entire response team.

After hearing from our panel of experts, we urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 360.

Thank you.