

SB 360 JPR 02-11-2026 - SLEOLA - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Brian Gill

Position: FAV



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



February 11, 2026

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: SB 360 – Criminal Law – Emergency Response Animal – Prohibited Actions Against –
SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Smith:

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

Senate Bill 360 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 Senator Henson for proposing this bill and ask the Committee for a favorable report for this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Brian Gill
President

cc: Members, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

SB 360.K-9 Animal Harm Penalties .docx - Google Do

Uploaded by: John Woolums

Position: FAV

SB 360 - Criminal Law - Emergency Response Animal - Prohibited Actions Against

Position: Support

Committee: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: February 11, 2026

From: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Department of General Services (DGS) respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 360. DGS and the Maryland Capitol Police (MCP), which includes the MCP Explosive Detection K-9 Unit, are in strong support of this legislation to update and enhance the provisions in Maryland law that criminalize the harming of an emergency response animal.

SB 360 would ensure that the array of harms conceivably committed against an emergency response animal includes injury, harassment and intimidation, and serious physical injury or death. The legislation updates the statutory definition of serious physical injury to include disfigurement and impairment or loss of bodily function. In addition, MCP supports the bill's approach to providing increased penalties based on the severity of the harm to the animal.

The MCP K-9 Unit is comprised of six K-9 officers and their handlers. The Unit provides K-9 services not only in Baltimore and Annapolis, but also in and around state-owned and state-leased buildings throughout Maryland. The Unit also supports many other police departments across the state where bomb detection resources are needed. In addition, the MCP K-9 Unit works in close partnership with the Maryland Stadium Authority, scanning the stadiums for the Baltimore Ravens and Orioles home games. MCP K-9 officers and their handlers provide essential law enforcement and public safety services that are vital to the safety and security of citizens across Maryland and those who visit our State.

Throughout 2025, the MCP K-9 Unit participated in 147 community demonstrations and responded as the lead K-9 agency for 5 active bomb threats. In addition, the Unit conducted 4,485 K-9 scans, including:

- 987 patrol checks;
- 764 vehicle scans;
- 72 traffic enforcement scans;
- 281 VIP event scans; and
- 125 scans of unattended bags.

DGS and MCP support this legislation's comprehensive revisions and enhancements to criminal penalties associated with harming one of our MCP K-9 officers, as they are highly trained, greatly valued, and much-loved members of the MCP force.

For these reasons, DGS respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 360.

MCPA MSA SB 360 Emergency Response Animals SUPP.pd

Uploaded by: Samira Jackson

Position: FAV



Maryland Chiefs of Police Association

Maryland Sheriffs' Association



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith Jr., Chair and
Members of the Judicial Proceedings 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 11, 2026

RE: **SB 360 - Criminal Law - Emergency Response Animal - Prohibited Actions Against**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) **SUPPORT SB 360**. 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. SB 360 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. SB 360 properly recognizes that reality and reinforces the respect and protection these animals deserve. For these reasons, MCPA and MSA respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE** report.

SB0360sponsor testimonyFeb11.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Shaneka Henson

Position: FAV

SHANEKA HENSON
Legislative District 30
Anne Arundel County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY

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.

SB360 Humane World for Animals FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Stacey Volodin

Position: FAV



Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States and
Humane Society International

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February 11, 2026

Judicial Proceedings Committee

**SB360 - Emergency Response Animal - Prohibited Actions Against
FAVORABLE**

Humane World for Animals, on behalf of our supporters across Maryland, respectfully urges a favorable report for SB360. This bill aims to strengthen protections for police dogs and horses, as well as search and rescue and other emergency service animals, by elevating penalties for acts of cruelty and intentional harm. Humane World for Animals works closely with law enforcement professionals nationwide on animal cruelty investigations and training and we consistently hear that stronger penalties for attacks on working animals are a necessary, practical tool that reinforces the seriousness of the crime.

There have been multiple troubling incidents in which working dogs were deliberately kicked, beaten, or otherwise maimed while performing their duties. These cases underscore a significant gap in Maryland law: despite the vital role these animals play in public safety, the code currently contains only a single provision addressing injury to emergency service animals, and it does not adequately reflect the seriousness of these crimes.

Police dogs, mounted patrol horses, and search and rescue dogs are highly trained partners who work alongside law enforcement officers and first responders in dangerous, high-stress environments. They locate missing persons, apprehend dangerous suspects, detect narcotics and explosives, control crowds, and protect officers and the public. An attack on one of these animals is not only an act of cruelty, it is an attack on public safety and on the officers who rely on them. When a service animal is injured or killed, the consequences extend beyond the animal itself: officers are put at greater risk, critical operations are disrupted, and communities lose a valuable public safety resource.

Emergency service animals serve Maryland with loyalty, courage, and dedication. They deserve legal protections that reflect their role and the risks they face every day. For these reasons, Humane World for Animals strongly urges the committee to support this legislation and ensure Maryland law provides meaningful, enforceable protections for police dogs, police horses, and search and rescue animals.

Stacey Volodin

Maryland State Director, Humane World for Animals
svolodin@humaneworld.org

SB 360 WMD K9 Search and Rescue.pdf

Uploaded by: Richard Smith

Position: FWA



Western Maryland K-9 Search and Rescue, Inc.

Quality • Focus • Teamwork

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February 11, 2026

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB 360 – Criminal Law – Emergency Response Animal – Prohibited Actions Against

Dear Chair Smith:

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 Senate Bill 360 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, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee