



State of Maryland
Department of State Police
Government Affairs Unit
Annapolis Office (410) 260-6100

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

DATE: April 2, 2026

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 360 **POSITION:** Support

BILL TITLE: Criminal Law – Emergency Response Animal – Prohibited Actions Against

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

This legislation expands existing law designed to protect law enforcement K-9s to include emergency response animals other than police K-9s. The bill strengthens existing law by establishing specific criminal penalties for individuals who intentionally inflict bodily harm, cause permanent disability, or kill an animal owned or used by a law enforcement or an emergency response agency. It also makes it unlawful to harass, interfere with, injure, or cause serious physical injury or death to an emergency response animal while it is performing official duties. Most importantly the legislation repeals “self defense” as a reasonable defense when causing intentional injury to a police K-9.

Current law criminalizes acts of serious animal cruelty, except in cases of self-defense only as it applies to law enforcement K-9s. Law enforcement agencies use horses, K-9s and K-9s provided by other organizations depending on the type of case.

This legislation extends enhanced legal protections to law enforcement K-9s and other emergency response animals. Under this proposal, individuals who intentionally inflict bodily harm on these animals may be guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction subject to imprisonment and/or a fine, recognizing the critical role they play in hindering public safety operations.

The Maryland State Police (MSP) rely on highly trained K-9s for narcotics detection, explosive detection, suspect apprehension, locating missing persons, recovering human remains, and other essential law enforcement and emergency response missions. These K-9s undergo years of specialized training and are supported through significant public investment. They serve alongside sworn officers and are vital members of public safety teams. Interfering with a K-9 is, in effect, interfering with law enforcement’s ability to respond to emergencies and protect the public.

Unfortunately, MSP K-9s have been subjected to intentional harm and interference while performing their duties. For example, an explosive detection K-9 was intentionally struck by an intoxicated individual while working at a Baltimore Ravens game. In another incident, a patrol K-9 was kicked during a large-scale protest at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. Additionally, an explosive detection K-9 and handler were harassed when beer cans were thrown at them during a public safety assignment. In a separate incident, a CDS detection patrol/utility K-9 was severely

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injured in a vehicle collision caused by an impaired driver and was later humanely euthanized due to non-recoverable injuries.

These incidents highlight the real and ongoing risks law enforcement service animals face in the line of duty. MSP K-9s and other emergency response animals are often deployed first into dangerous and unpredictable situations, whether assisting with fire investigations, tracking suspects, or locating missing persons. These animals face many of the same dangers as the officers they accompany and deserve comparable legal protections. Enhancing penalties for those who harm or obstruct them will help deter misconduct, promote respect for public safety operations, and ensure these invaluable partners can continue to serve and protect Maryland's citizens safely and effectively.

For these reasons, the Maryland Department of State Police urge the Committee to give Senate Bill 360 a favorable report.