



POLICE DEPARTMENT
City of Benicia

October 2, 2024

Sent via email (cdclower@solano.courts.ca.gov)

Honorable Judge Jones
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
Solano County Superior Court
600 Union Avenue
Fairfield, CA 94533

RE: City of Benicia Response to 2023-2024 Solano County Grand Jury 2022-2023 Grand Jury Report, "Solano Canine Officer Training, Handling, & End of Career Polices."

Judge Jones:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations, received on June 18, 2024. This letter shall serve as the City of Benicia's response in accordance with Penal Code section 933.05 to the Solano County Grand Jury report entitled "Solano Canine Officer Training, Handling, & End of Career Polices" as approved by the Benicia City Council on October 1, 2024.

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDING 1. On-going in-service training with canines and canine handlers is currently taking place, but not consistent across all agencies throughout the County. Canine pre-deployment training has generally been through a third party outside of the law enforcement agency. In the past, pre-deployment training practices had been a harsh environment for the canine. Occasionally severe discipline was used to train the canine causing the canine a high level of stress during and after the training period.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 1. The respondent disagrees partially with the finding. The City of Benicia is not able to make an informed assessment as to the consistency, or lack thereof, of training across all agencies in the County, and whether or not any training is harsh or includes severe discipline.

RECOMMENDATION 1. Use an outside agency for pre-deployment training only if the training facility and trainers are adhering to Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) training.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 1. The recommendation has been implemented. The City of Benicia utilizes an outside contractor to provide the training requirements needed to meet POST standards.

FINDING 2 – While there is a retirement plan for the Patrol Officers, there is no standard Canine Officers retirement plan available. This leaves the canine handler to cover all medical costs which may include injuries that occurred while in service.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 2. The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. The City of Benicia transfers the canine and kennel facility in “as is” condition for the Transferee’s personal use. Any and all costs associated with the canine after transfer of ownership is the responsibility of the transferee; the City bears no financial responsibility.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – Provide all retired Canine Officers with medical insurance coverage at time of retirement, similar to that of the Patrol Officers. Medical coverage must cover both the scheduled routine medical issues and emergency medical services if ever needed. A meal allowance must also be in place for all retired Canine Officers. Create a standardized procedure in place for handling of retired Canine Officers until end of life. In the placement of a retiring Canine Officer the current handler should be given first choice. In the event that they cannot take on that role, there needs to be a process in place for continued care.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 2. The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. It is understood that the canine was removed from service because of age, performance, or disability has made such canine unqualified for further police purposes. The City of Benicia, its City Council, board commissions, officers, agents, and employees shall have no liability for further care of said canine or for claims or suits, including claims for death or injury to persons, or loss of, or damage to, property, arising out of activities of, related to, said canine occurring after transfer of said canine to Transferee by City.

FINDING 3 – Not all law enforcement agencies within the county have Canine Officers. The law enforcement agencies that do, see multiple benefits of having the Canine Officers on staff. In some cases, an increase in non-confrontational apprehensions is as much as ten times over those of a non-Canine Team.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 3. The respondent agrees with the finding.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – Increase Canine Officer staffing throughout the County. All law enforcement agencies should have at least one Canine Officer per shift. For the larger agencies, more Canine Officers may be needed to cover all needed situations and areas. Canine Officer/population ratio should be at least one Canine Officer per 15,000 population.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 3. The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. The City of Benicia has one Canine Officer for a population of approximately 28,000. An additional Canine Officer is not warranted for a city of our size.

FINDING 4 – There are only a few Peer Support Canines available to assist in emotional and behavioral support within a few agencies. Peer Support Canines play an important role in monitoring and recognizing the emotional and behavioral needs within high stress events and are able to soothe and support through their calming and caring personalities.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 4. The respondent agrees with the finding.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – Increase Peer Support Canine staffing. All law enforcement agencies need to have at least one Peer Support Canine per shift.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 4. The recommendation has been implemented. Recently the City of Benicia Police Department added a Peer Support Canine to their staff: Laura, a 2-year-old, female, Yellow Lab. The canine and her handler have attended several special events and community events and have made visits to partner agencies in Solano County to provide emotional support following recent incidents that have resulted in the loss of a public safety colleague. However, additional peer support canines (one per shift as noted) is not reasonable for the City of Benicia Police Department or the community due to the extent of the financial and budget commitment to do so.

FINDING 5 – Canine activity and incident tracking throughout the county differs between agencies. Although being tracked, the agencies have adopted their own manner of tracking and documenting. This allows the media to exploit only the rare aggressive activities with little exposure to the positive side of the Canine Officer's contribution.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 5. The respondent agrees with the finding.

RECOMMENDATION 5 – Activity and incident tracking within the county for Canine Teams need to be consistent. Have Canine Team activity reports readily available to the public.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 5. The recommendation has been implemented. The City of Benicia utilizes an activity and incident tracking software and reports activities, as pursuant to current State law.

FINDING 6 – Canine Officers no longer engage in crowd control, as having canines in large crowds over stressed the Canine Officer, causing confusion.

RESPONSE TO FINDING 6. The respondent agrees with the finding.

RECOMMENDATION 6 – Continue using the Canine Officers only in patrol, detection and search and rescue.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 6. The recommendation has been implemented. Our Canine Officer is primarily used for patrol and detection, and if needed, during search and rescue operations. However, the City of Benicia more often relies upon more specialized canines from partner agencies for search and rescue operations. The Canine Officer does also attend some community events to assist the Department in educating the public about their training and capabilities, and to build community support.

Sincerely,



Mark Menesini, Police Chief

DocuSigned by:
Mario Giuliani
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Mario Giuliani, City Manager

cc:

Wayne B Goodman, Foreperson, 2023-24 Solano County Civil Grand Jury
City Council of the City of Benicia
Ben Stock, City Attorney of the City of Benicia
Congressmen John Garamendi and Mike Thompson
State Senators Dave Min and Brian Dahle
State Assemblymembers Alex Lee, Ash Kalra, Corey Jackson, Isaac Bryan and Robert Rivas
Solano County Assemblymember Lori D. Wilson