



CITY OF FAIRFIELD

Founded 1856 - Incorporated December 12, 1903

CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

September 4, 2024

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

SENT VIA EMAIL

Re: 2022-2023 Civil Grand Jury Report Entitled: Solano County Canine Officer Training Handling & End of Career Policies

Dear Honorable Alesia Jones:

This letter is on behalf of the City Council and the Chief of Police in response to the Grand Jury request dated June 18, 2024, regarding the Solano County Canine Officer Training Handling & End of Career Policies. The Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations are listed below, along with the response:

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.”*

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 practices with positive reinforcement. For on-going in-service training, continue monthly training of the canine team through positive reinforcement. Train for a minimum of 16 hours a month, or 192 hours annually on current skills and new techniques. Elements of the training techniques should be made available to the public.”*

Council and City's Response – The Fairfield Police Department has long been committed to a rigorous training program following the POST guidelines established in 2014. The industry standard for over a decade has been 16 hours of monthly training, and we meet or exceed that

Letter to Honorable Wendy G. Getty

Re: 2022-2023 Civil Grand Jury Report Entitled: Solano County Canine Officer Training Handling & End of Career Policies

August 28, 2024

Page 2

training recommendation routinely. Positive reinforcement-based discipline and consistency in program training are key to reducing stress levels on the canines while maintaining the necessary high level of obedience required in law enforcement.

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.”*

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.”

Council and City’s Response – Upon retirement, the assigned officer is provided the opportunity to purchase the canine from the city for a symbolic \$1.00. This includes a sales contract officially transferring ownership of the animal to the officer, allowing it to live out its retirement years in a family environment. This is a well-earned benefit for their years of service. In that contract, the new owner assumes all liability for the canine’s behavior and medical expenses. While under no obligation to purchase the canine, no handler has ever chosen to not keep their canine partner in retirement.

Controlling costs within the canine program is essential to its continued success. Officers at the Fairfield Police Department currently have no city-provided medical insurance provided by the city contrary to this finding. Upon retirement, some canine’s pre-existing medical conditions have been covered by the city. However, covering the lifetime expenses of all the retired canines may prove to be cost-prohibitive, particularly when the number of retired canines can exceed the active canines owned by the 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.”*

Letter to Honorable Wendy G. Getty

Re: 2022-2023 Civil Grand Jury Report Entitled: Solano County Canine Officer Training Handling & End of Career Policies

August 28, 2024

Page 3

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.”*

Council and City’s Response – The Fairfield Police Department largely agrees with the recommendation on this finding, provided those smaller agencies commit to the necessary training, funding, and oversight expected by industry standards, POST guidelines, and current or future legislation. Basing the number of canines deployed by a department on population, while ignoring the deployment rates, could result in an unnecessarily large canine program that is not justified by budgets or needs. A neglected or resource-starved canine program can have detrimental effects on those departments or the public they serve.

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.”*

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

Council and City’s Response – The Fairfield Police Department concurs with this finding as well. The department currently deploys two Peer Support canines at two separate locations.

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.”*

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.”*

Council and City’s Response – The tracking of canine activity has become an industry standard with several software vendors providing robust programs to track nearly every aspect of the canine’s usage. While tracking consistency is viable, one size does not fit all when it comes to department budgets and cultures within an agency.

Letter to Honorable Wendy G. Getty

Re: 2022-2023 Civil Grand Jury Report Entitled: Solano County Canine Officer Training Handling & End of Career Policies

August 28, 2024

Page 4

Consistency in the tracking data itself should be the goal within every police department. Every agency should be thoroughly familiar with their data and how to produce it publicly. Fairfield Police Department employs a crime analyst and a designated K9 coordinator, both of whom are completely versed in the data and activities of the canine program. This allows the department to respond to any media inquiry, report, or Public Records Act request with timely and accurate information.

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

Recommendation 6 – *“Continue using the Canine Officers only in patrol, detection and search and rescue.”*

Council and City’s Response – The Fairfield Police Department does not use canines for crowd control and concurs with the recommendation for continued use in patrol, detection, search, and rescue, along with additional uses that may be found to be reasonable and promote public safety.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



DAVID J. GASSAWAY
City Manager

Attachment 1: Solano County Grand Jury letter dated June 18, 2024

Attachment 2: Solano County Civil Grand Jury: 2023-2024 Solano County Canine Officer Training Handling & End of Career Policies

cc: City Council
Dan Marshall, Police Chief