



SOLANO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
Thomas A. Ferrara, Sheriff-Coroner

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July 29, 2024

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

Re: Sheriff-Coroner's Response to 2023-2024 Solano County Grand Jury Report – 240621 Solano County Canine Officer Training, Handling & End of Career Policies

Judge Jones:

Under Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, I am responding to the following recommendations contained in the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report that pertain to matters under my control as the Solano County Sheriff-Coroner:

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 – I disagree partially with the finding, please see my response to the recommendation below for why I partially disagree with this finding.

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.

Response to Recommendation 1 – Recommendation has been implemented. The Sheriff's Office has always utilized best practices for the training of the K-9s and have always conducted our pre-deployment training, subsequent annual qualifications, and ongoing 18 hours of monthly training according to Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) training practices. Furthermore, the Solano County Sheriff's Office utilizes public engagements at schools, fairs, and other community events to showcase the training and discipline and skills of the K-9s and their handlers.

Dedicated to Community Service

Our K-9s are trained utilizing two general methods; positive reinforcement and corrections, to create a balanced training technique specific to each dog. The correction method is not discipline nor is it severe; correction is administered not to punish the dog rather used to get the dog's attention and change their behavior. Any training tool used in this approach is carefully considered to serve its purpose while not harming the dog in the process.

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 – I disagree wholly with the finding, please see my response to the recommendation below for why I disagree with this finding.

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- Recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. Deputies purchase the retired canine from the County and assume all ownership and liability.

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 – I agree 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 has been implemented at the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office assigns canines on every patrol shift and an additional K-9 in the jails. The Sheriff's Office has no control over other law enforcement agencies.

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 – I disagree partially with the finding, please see my response to the recommendation below for why I partially disagree with this 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 – Recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. The Sheriff’s Office agrees with the benefits of having designated Peer Support Canines and we are working towards implementing a program; however, it will not be as recommended. The staffing and resources required to implement as recommendation would be resource challenging and not best practice. Solano County law enforcement agencies may discuss a regional approach and/or leverage outside volunteer groups to aid in our peer support initiatives.

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 – I agree 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 Sheriff’s Office utilizes an activity and incident tracking systems and reports its activities pursuant to current state law.

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 canines are primarily used for patrol and detection, while our OES partners maintain specialized canines for search and rescue. However, we also utilize our canines at public events to educate our community on what they’re capabilities are and to interact with them to establish and maintain community support.

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

Response to Finding 6– Agrees with the finding

Respectfully,



Thomas A. Ferrara
Sheriff-Coroner

cc: Solano County Grand Jury
County Administrator’s Office