

SOLANO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

2023-2024

**Solano County Canine Officer Training,
Handling & End of Career Policies**

June 21, 2024

Solano County Canine Training, Handling & End of Career Policies

Solano County Civil Grand Jury 2023-2024

I. SUMMARY

Many are led to believe that canines used in law enforcement are overly aggressive and out of control. That is not true.

The Solano County Civil Grand Jury (SCCGJ)'s in-depth investigation contradicted what the media has portrayed. The Jury found the duties for canines working in law enforcement are widespread and extremely valuable to law enforcement agencies.

The Jury undertook an investigation of the Canine Officers training and handling policies and procedures. In the past, pre-deployment training practices by vendors had been aggressively harsh and overly demanding. National attention on canine training and handling by patrol officers has been portrayed as overly aggressive.

Both pre- and post-deployment training, along with proper handling, is critical to the day-to-day care of Canine Officers.

The Jury reviewed overall canine usage and staffing with all law enforcement agencies throughout the county.

II. INTRODUCTION

Solano County's Civil Grand Jury investigation on canine activity and duties contradicted much of what the media presents. Canine training has been updated to a positive reinforcement training curriculum with improved results. Apprehensions are much higher with a canine unit than those without canines. The Grand Jury received information indicating that apprehensions were as much as ten times greater with an officer / canine team than without. In many cases, the canine officer was never deployed, but being on-site deterred the suspect through intimidation.

An in-depth review of Canine Officer's career policies throughout Solano County included:

- Breeds
- Initial canine training
- Handler training
- Canine responsibilities
- Training within specialty areas/services
- Monthly training
- Medical care
- Canine monthly/annual activity statistics
- Canine apprehension rates
- End of career handling

III. STATEMENT OF FACTS

The phrase “Canine Officer” used in this report, refers to the County’s well-trained canines. The phrase “Handler” refers to the sworn human officer who works with the Canine Officer on a day-to-day basis as the other half of a well-trained team. “Canine Team” refers to a Canine Officer and its Handler. The phrase “Peer Support Canines” refers to canines who have been trained to identify emotional and behavioral situations.

Solano County Canine Officers activity “annualized:”

Detection refers to using the canines for searching narcotics, explosives, firearms, or articles recently discarded.

- Detection
 - Canine Officer Deployments 1,475
 - Search Areas 188
 - Alerts / Indications 57
 - Seizure Incidents 72

Patrol refers to using the canines to search for a person.

- Patrol
 - Canine Officer Deployments 1,567
 - People Found 179
 - Apprehensions with Bites 11 (less than 1%)

Less than one percent of the apprehensions with a Canine Team is a takedown with bites.

Canine Team apprehension rates show they are up to ten times higher than that of non-Canine Officers. It was stated that many perpetrators are intimidated and surrender due to the presence of a Canine Officer.

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 canines, causing a high level of stress during and after the training period.

Pre- and post-deployment training practices have shifted from negative, harsh, and forceful training to more positive reinforcement with improved results.

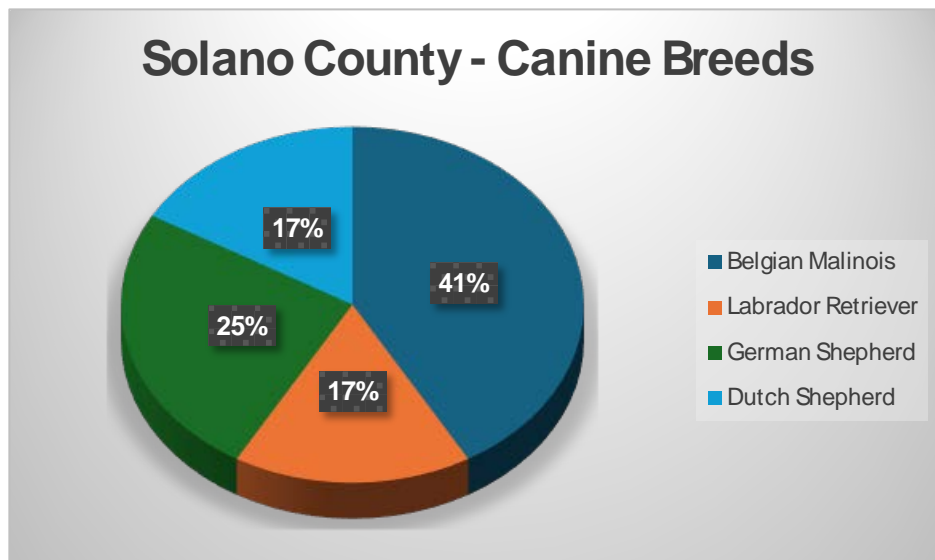
Male canines tend to be bigger and stronger than females, making them a better fit to the needs of the agencies.

Countywide

- 24 Canine Officers and Peer Support Canines are all male dogs.
 - Canine Officers
 - 10 (41%) - Belgian Malinois
 - 6 (25%) - German Shepherd
 - 4 (17%) - Dutch Shepherd
 - Peer Support Canines
 - 4 (17%) - Labrador Retriever

Many of the Canine Officers have been trained in dual roles such as standardized patrol service and apprehension, narcotic detection, explosives, search and rescue, specialized detection, and cadaver detection.

Canine Teams are trained to protect the public as well as each other. When needed the Handler can release the Canine Officer from the car with a belt mounted door button. This enables the Canine Officer to deploy and locate their Handler to provide aid.



- Eight Agencies:
 - Benicia Police Department
 - Dixon Police Department
 - Fairfield Police Department
 - Rio Vista Police Department
 - Solano County Sheriff 's Department
 - Suisun City Police Department
 - Vacaville Police Department
 - Vallejo Police Department

Solano County Sheriff's Department

- Canine Officer # 1 – 4 years old Belgian Malinois
- Canine Officer # 2 – 6 years old Belgian Malinois
- Canine Officer # 3 – 4 years old Belgian Malinois
- Canine Officer # 4 – 3 years old Belgian Malinois
- Canine Officer # 5 – 2 years old Belgian Malinois
- Canine Officer # 6 – 2 years old Dutch Shepherd
- Peer Support Canine # 7 – 6 years old Labrador Retriever

Benicia Police Department

- Canine Officer # 1 – 5 years old Belgian Malinois

Dixon Police Department

- Canine Officer # 1 – 4 years old Belgian Malinois

Fairfield Police Department

- Canine Officer # 1 – 3 years old German Shepherd
- Canine Officer # 2 – 2 years old Dutch Shepherd
- Canine Officer # 3 – 9 years old German Shepherd
- Canine Officer # 4 – 2 years old German Shepherd
- Peer Support Canine # 5 – 2 years old Yellow Labrador Retriever
- Peer Support Canine # 6 – 2 years old Black Labrador Retriever

Rio Vista Police Department

- Canine Officer # 1 – 2 years old Dutch Shepherd

Suisun City Police Department

- Currently no Canine Officers nor Peer Support Canines

Vacaville Police Department

- Canine Officer # 1 – 3 years old Dutch Shepherd
- Canine Officer # 2 – 3 years old Belgian Malinois
- Canine Officer # 3 – 2 years old Belgian Malinois
- Peer Support Canine # 4 – 2 years old Labrador Retriever

Vallejo Police Department

- Canine Officer # 1 – 4 years old Belgian Malinois
- Canine Officer # 2 – 1 year old German Shepherd
- Canine Officer # 3 – 6 years old German Shepherd
- Canine Officer # 4 – 7 years old German Shepherd

Solano County	Population	% of the County	Canines / Population
• City of Benicia	26,819	5.9%	1 Canine per 26,819

• City of Dixon	18,974	4.2%	1 Canine per 18,974
• City of Fairfield	119,706	26.5%	1 Canine per 19,951
• City of Rio Vista	10,533	2.3%	1 Canine per 10,533
• City of Suisun City	29,165	6.5%	N/A
• City of Vallejo	124,886	27.6%	1 Canine per 24,977
• City of Vacaville	103,078	22.9%	1 Canine per 51,539
• Unincorporated Areas	18,556	4.1%	N/A
○ (Elmira & Birds Landing)			
• Solano County	451,716	100.0%	1 Canine per 19,640

Canine Officers are no longer used for crowd control. Canines are directed by their handlers generally with a single task and/or direction.

Peer Support Canines have been trained to identify emotional and behavioral situations. They have the ability to respond to the emotional needs of individuals with their caring nature or a simple wag of their tail. Peer Support Canine acquisition in many cases come from the local SPCA and/or animal shelters. Many are rescue canines being placed back into society with a purpose to serve the public.

Canine support training is currently taking place at California Medical Facility (CMF) and California State Prison (CSP).

Inmates working through their rehabilitation to reenter society are currently training canines for several public and emotional service needs.

Every department or agency has a form of reporting of canine activity, we found a lack of consistency throughout Solano County. We also found very little visibility to the public.

As the Canine Officers and Peer Support Canines age and retire from service, retirement benefits are lacking to cover the cost of canine health care and much of their day-to-day handling cost. Much of this cost becomes the current handler’s responsibility. This is in contrast to human sworn officers whose retirement benefits include health care.

IV. 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

COMMENTS

Solano County’s Civil Grand Jury investigation on canine activity and duties contradicted much of what the media is presenting. Canine training has been updated from past years to a positive reinforcement training curriculum with improved results. Apprehensions are much higher with a canine team than without. Data shows as much as ten times more apprehensions with a Canine Team than without. In many cases, the Canine Officer was never deployed, but being on site deterred the suspect through intimidation.

We applaud the use of Brady’s K-9 Fund or similar agencies and grants to support Canine Officers’ needs, both while in-service and retired.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Solano County Board of Supervisors	Findings 1-6
Solano County Sheriff	Findings 1-6
Chief of Police	
City of Benicia	Findings 1-6
City of Dixon	Findings 1-6
City of Fairfield	Findings 1-6
City of Rio Vista	Findings 1-6
City of Suisun City	Findings 1-6
City of Vacaville	Findings 1-6
City of Vallejo	Findings 1-6
City Council	
City of Benicia	Findings 1-6
City of Dixon	Findings 1-6
City of Fairfield	Findings 1-6
City of Rio Vista	Findings 1-6
City of Suisun City	Findings 1-6
City of Vacaville	Findings 1-6
City of Vallejo	Findings 1-6

COURTESY COPIES

Congressman
 John Garamendi
 Mike Thompson
State Senators
 Dave Min

Brian Dahle	1021 O Street Sacramento, CA 95814
State Assemblymembers	
Alex Lee	Suite # 6330
Ash Kalra	Suite # 4610
Corey Jackson	Suite # 6120
Isaac Bryan	Suite # 5360
Robert Rivas	Suite # 8330
Solano County Assemblymember	
Lori D. Wilson	

V. METHODOLOGY

- Data received from the following agencies.
 - Benicia Police Department
 - Brady's K9 Fund
 - Brian Peterson @ All Duty Canine
 - Dixon Police Department
 - Fairfield Police Department
 - Fairfield Police Department – 2022 Annual Report
 - Fairfield PD Gets a Therapy Dog – The Reporter – August 25, 2022
 - Rio Vista Police Department
 - Solano County Sheriff Department
 - Suisun City Police Department
 - Therapy Dog Playing Roles – Fox 11 – July 1, 2022
 - Vacaville Police Department
 - Vallejo Police Department
 - 2021 U.S. Census
 - Capital Weekly – April 30, 2023
 - Assemblymember's Home Page
 - The Reporter – Cort Retires - March 8, 2024

VI. ATTACHMENT

Vacaville "The Reporter" March 8, 2024

Fairfield PD's K-9 Cort retires from service.

Fairfield Police Department Sergeant Michael Pena with K-9 Cort, along with Fairfield Mayor Catherine Moy and his family during the Fairfield City Council meeting March 5 after a proclamation was issued declaring the day "Cort Day" upon recognition of K-9 Cort's retirement.

With nearly nine years of dedicated service under his collar, Fairfield Police Department K-9 Cort has retired from law enforcement.

"Cort quickly became a favorite around the department and community," said Jennifer Brantley, Public Information Officer for the Fairfield PD. "With his friendly personality he was always up for socializing during public demonstrations or just greeting fellow

employees around the department. Even though he had this soft playful side to him, he would quickly change and get down to business if commands were given by Sergeant Pena.”

According to Fairfield PD officials, Cort – born as Malínského Statku – was born on March 10, 2014, in the Czech Republic and came to the Bay Area in March of 2015 to be tested by the department. He was then paired with Sgt. Mike Pena one week before his first birthday and together, they went to a one-month basic K-9 handler school where they learned how to work as a team in both obedience and apprehension work.

While Cort demonstrated excellent work ethic during his lengthy career, Pena recalls the young pup beginning to test his handler’s patience back at handler school.

“At times during the training Cort would decide that he needed a well-deserved break,” said Fairfield PD officials during an awards ceremony held Feb. 28. “He would take off running from Sgt. Pena and head down to the waterfront to chase the ducks around while completely ignoring commands to come back.”

Still, Cort was a great learner and he and Sgt. Pena then attended a six-week explosive detection school, a two-week tracking and trailing school, one-week SWAT K-9 school, and one-week advanced patrol tactics school.

After completing patrol tactics school, Sgt. Pena and Cort would go on to receive additional training in other specialized areas to include tracking, explosives, and SKIDDS – specialized training for K-9s to be deploy with the SWAT Team. In 2016, Cort also became the department’s first K-9 to become certified in detecting explosives, according to officials.

“Once the initial certifications were complete, that unbreakable K-9 and handler bond began to form between this team,” said department officials.

During Cort’s nearly nine years of service, Fairfield PD officials said the K-9 achieved several impressive accomplishments, including over 2800 training hours; 433 field deployments; 35 suspect apprehensions; over 90 suspect surrenders; multiple activations with SWAT; and over 650 events.

“Over the last several years Cort has exemplified the unwavering loyalty, bravery, and dedication that police dogs bring to law enforcement,” said officials.

Unfortunately, some of Cort’s deployments came with serious consequences.

In January 2019, Cort was searching a heavily brushed creek bed for a wanted violent criminal. After Cort and Sgt. Pena were ambushed, Cort was still able to locate and apprehended the suspect but was stabbed multiple times during the process. At the time of the incident, Peña credited Cort with saving his life by demonstrating bravery, while subduing the assailant despite his injuries.

Then in February 2020, Fairfield SWAT surrounded a home after a male severely beat a woman in a home the night before.

“A standoff lasted nearly six hours, so Cort was deployed to search for the now concealed suspect, quickly locating him hiding in the garage,” read the proclamation.” During the apprehension, Cort suffered a serious through and through laceration to his paw.

In 2022, Cort was deployed into a residence to search for a suspect who broke into a citizen’s home. During the search, Cort apprehended the suspect, and, in the process, he was bitten in the face and stabbed again. Despite being injured, Cort continued to engage

the suspect until officers were able to complete the arrest. For Cort's actions, he was the first Fairfield Police K-9 to receive the purple heart medal.

According to officials, K-9 Cort has also assisted neighboring agencies in searching for violent criminals, including conducting yard to yard searches in the City of Davis for Davis Police Officer Natalie Corona's killer, completing explosive detection searches for visiting presidential candidates, and assisting in dozens of SWAT operations.

"While searching for a parolee at large, K-9 Cort was deployed along with police officers to search a residence," said Moy. "Cort pushed through a partially open bedroom door, deploying a booby trap from above, which due to his quick movements, he avoided injury and therefore, protected officers from injury."

In addition to being honored by Fairfield Police Department officials during their 2023 awards ceremony Feb. 28, Cort was also recognized by the Fairfield City Council March 5 when Mayor Catherine Moy presented a proclamation declaring that day as "Cort Day" in Fairfield, to celebrate the many accomplishments that this police dog attained while wishing him a very well-deserved retirement.

"Cort's career is a story of resilience," said Moy. "Reaching a well-deserved retirement, K-9 Cort now spends most of his time relaxing poolside, socializing with his companion Riley and Officer Peña's wife and three children. Although his presence in the Fairfield community is ending, the memory of his life of service to this community will last for years to come."