

Georgia Department of Public Safety

Policy Manual

SUBJECT OPSS CANINE PROGRAM	POLICY NUMBER 25.14
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25.14.1 Purpose

The Georgia Department of Public Safety (DPS) recognizes the Service Canine program can help bridge the gap between a traumatic event and the connection to mental health support. A compassionate presence leveraging the human canine bond may help restore a person's emotional and cognitive equilibrium. The first contact with an impacted individual is important. It can help establish an effective helping relationship and increase the person's receptiveness to further help. The purpose of this policy is to outline the DPS Office of Public Safety Support Service Canine Program, including the process of qualifications, selections, training, supervision, equipment, care, use, and activation.

25.14.2 Policy

It is the policy of the Georgia Department of Public Safety to provide support to its members and other public safety agencies with reliable, highly trained canine teams, which can assist first responders throughout the State of Georgia after traumatic events and emotional crisis.

25.14.3 Titles, Definitions, and Chain of Command

For this policy, the following titles and definitions apply:

- A. The Office of Public Safety Support (OPSS) Director shall oversee the Service Canine Program.
- B. The OPSS Deputy Director, shall be the manager of the Service Canine Program, and have responsibility for the overall standards and procedures associated with the Service Canine Program and shall report to the Director of OPSS.
- C. Canine Team - consists of a OPSS member trained and certified as a Service Canine Handler ("Canine Handler" or "Handler") and a canine, certified to Department standards.
- D. Service Canine - an animal trained to do tasks for a person or persons with a physical or mental disability and to provide emotional support to first responders.
- E. Discipline – the area of training and skills of the Department's canines, whether Single or Dual-Purpose Canines.

25.14.4 Canine Disciplines

Public Safety Service canines are primarily trained in the Disciplines of PTSD/Anxiety detection and interruption.

25.14.5 Procedures

A. Organization

1. All OPSS Canine Handlers will report to the OPSS Deputy Director. The Deputy Director shall act as liaison between the Handlers and the OPSS Director.
2. Canine Handlers shall perform their canine duties in addition to their regular duties.
3. The OPSS Deputy Director shall have the following responsibilities:
 - a. Provide the Director with a current listing of active Canine Teams, their capabilities, and their locations within the state.
 - b. Schedule and assign assistance for one on one's, debriefings, seminars, and public events.
 - c. Investigate and make recommendations to the Director concerning incidents where a department canine has caused injury to a person or animal, or damaged personal property.
 - d. Receive requests for canine use and coordinate with the Director and Handlers for peer purposes.
4. Canine Handler Responsibilities:
 - a. Service Canine Teams will make every effort to respond to first responders in need of peer consultation when appropriate.
 - b. The Service Canine Handler shall notify the Deputy Director via email whenever the Handler is unavailable to respond (e.g., on annual or sick leave). The notification message shall include how long the Service Canine Handler will be unavailable.
 - c. The Service Canine Handler shall transport the canine in a Department-issued Vehicle when on duty.
 - d. After full certification is obtained, the service canine is expected to routinely accompany the handler on and off duty and to public places as much as possible to maintain the canine's training.

B. Processes for Handler Selection, Qualification, and Removal

1. When a position as a Service Canine Handler becomes available:
 - a. A member shall submit a resume and application to the OPSS Deputy Director.
 - b. Interviews will be conducted by an interview panel consisting of the OPSS Director, Deputy Director and a member of the Human Resources Division.

- c. The interview panel shall provide the Commissioner, or designee, with a recommendation based on the results of the interview.
- d. The selection of suitable candidates shall be approved by the Commissioner, or designee.

2. Minimum Requirements for Handler

To be eligible for selection as a Canine Handler, the applicant shall:

- a. Be an active member within the Department of Public Safety/Office of Public Safety Support for a minimum of one year;
- b. Have received a rating of 3.0 or higher on their most recent annual performance appraisal;
- c. Have no formal disciplinary action within the previous year;
- d. Be a non-smoker or agree not to smoke in the Canine Vehicle or in the presence of the canine;
- e. Have excellent written communication skills, and be very proficient in record keeping, and
- f. Have an appropriate living situation, which must include the following:
 - 1) Residing in a single-family residence.
 - 2) Suitable location to construct a kennel to Department standards.
 - 3) Support of spouse/family. Note: Serving as a Canine Handler should be a family decision which recognizes the Disciplines involved and the impact that the canine will have on a Handler's family. To be successful, the Canine Program requires the entire family's full cooperation, as the canine will become a part of the family's life. Family members are to be made fully aware of the requirements of this Program.
 - 4) No family member with allergies to or phobias regarding canines.
 - 5) No restrictive neighborhood covenants/regulations prohibiting either the subject canine breed or maintaining a kennel on premises. If an applicant lives in a restricted community or rental property with any such restrictions, then specific written permission must be obtained from the homeowner's association or landlord prior to sheltering the canine at such premises.

3. The Handler applicant agrees to the following:

- a. Provide suitable housing for the canine at his/her residence;
- b. Properly train and care for the canine;
- c. Recognize that the position requires unusual and extended working hours;
- d. Recognize that there is inherent potential for damage to personal property from the canine that could result in the potential for personal liability;

- e. Participate in appearances, and public speaking engagements with the canine as required; and
- f. Accept the assignment for a minimum of three years.

4. Handler Removal

There are several factors that influence the decision to remove a member from the Canine Program. They may include, but are not limited to:

- a. Any formal disciplinary action;
- b. The failure of the member to attend and complete required training;
- c. A failure to obtain at least a rating of 3.0 or higher on the members' most recent performance appraisal;
- d. Failure to maintain the canine to minimum established standards of health, maintenance, and certifications;
- e. Unsatisfactory job performance;
- f. Failure to respond to a call for service;
- g. Determination by the Director that removal is in the best interest of DPS/OPSS, and/or
- h. Voluntary removal after the member submits a written request to the Director advising of the effective date of inactive status.

C. Training

1. The member is required to successfully complete a Department-approved Service Canine Handler certification class within 18 months of initial assignment to the Canine Program. All training classes shall be from an approved Service Canine facility.
2. The Canine Handler is required to complete ongoing training for proficiency, as required by the Department.
 - a. Canine Teams shall attend a minimum of 20 hours of in-service training per year. Unless temporarily waived by the Director. Advanced Canine Handler courses and seminars recommended by the Deputy Director and pre-approved by the appropriate chain of command may also be required. Additional training sessions may be required if the Canine Team is not performing to established standards.
 - b. Canine Handlers may request additional maintenance training when they believe it would be beneficial; however, such additional training must be pre-approved in writing by the Deputy Director.
 - c. All such training shall be properly documented on the canine's training records.
3. Only members who have completed the required selection process and training are authorized to handle Department canines on a routine basis.

4. Canine Handlers shall maintain the proficiency of their assigned canine. Training sessions shall be used to optimize performance, correct deficiencies, practice specific training objectives, and complete other assignments as directed by the Deputy Director.

D. Certification

1. Canine Teams must complete all training necessary to achieve full Service Canine status from nationally or internationally recognized certifying agency(s) or by an approved vendor, any of which must be pre-authorized by the Department. Copies of certification documents shall be provided to the Deputy Director.
2. Expenses incurred for certification procedures shall be processed in accordance with the Department's purchasing guidelines.

E. Canine Selection

1. The canines for the Service Canine Program may come from donations or purchases.
2. Canines shall be evaluated for Service canine work, including willingness to please, calm and friendly, alert, socialized, nonreactive to public and strangers, quick to learn, able to retain information, emotionally, physically and demonstrating traits needed for specific training (e.g., PTSD and Anxiety detection/interruption).
3. Various breeds may be used, but it is recognized that certain breeds may perform better in a designated role than another. The Deputy Director may work with vendors and Handlers to select the best canine candidate for the Service Canine Program.
4. Canine candidates shall be pre-screened for illness and genetic deficiencies by a qualified veterinarian prior to acquisition by the Department.
5. All female/male Department canines shall be spayed/neutered at their appropriate life cycle.
6. Any canine nominated for donation to the Department of Public Safety shall be subject to the pre-screening requirements. If the canine is not being donated directly from a vendor, then the Deputy Director shall have the canine evaluated prior to submission of the donation request to the Board of Public Safety.
7. With express authorization by the Commissioner on a case-by-case basis, the Department of Public Safety shall return any canine to a vendor, within contract limits, for replacement or refund if that canine is deemed to be un-serviceable.

F. Canine Use

Canine Teams shall only be used in accordance with State and Federal laws.

G. Conditions and Limitations of Use

1. Use of canines for Outside Employment is prohibited.
2. The safety of the public and the performance of the canine are priorities of each Canine Handler.

3. Canines shall not be left unattended in a way they may have contact with the public or be placed in danger.
4. Canines shall not ride in the front seat area of the vehicle.
5. Unless exigent circumstances require it, the canine shall not be allowed or encouraged to jump on or be permitted on the exterior of any Departmental vehicle.
6. Under normal circumstances, only the Canine Handler shall feed, handle, exercise or give commands to their assigned canine.
7. The Canine Handler shall always maintain strict control and security of the canine.
8. Under no circumstances shall the Canine Handler allow another Department member or citizen to intentionally tease or agitate their assigned canine except during authorized training sessions by qualified personnel participating in the training.

H. Canine-Inflicted Injury

1. The Canine Handler and a Department supervisor shall examine all alleged injuries inflicted by a canine on any person (including the Canine Handler) or animal. Medical attention shall be provided immediately to any injured person.
2. The Canine Handler shall make color photographs of all alleged injuries, regardless of the suspected nature of the injuries, or whether medical treatment by qualified personnel has already occurred.
3. The Canine Handler shall complete an incident report explaining the circumstances for any incident.
4. The Director of Legal Services shall be notified of any alleged injury within 48-hours and furnished a copy of the Incident Report and all supporting information immediately upon completion.

I. Care of Canines

Canines entrusted to a Canine Handler are the sole responsibility of the Canine Handler for care, feeding, grooming, cleanliness, training, and maintenance for meeting performance standards. Payment of services discussed below shall be processed through the Department's budget procedures.

1. Canines shall be groomed, inspected, and handled daily.
2. The canine's kennel shall be cleaned daily and maintained in a sanitary condition.
3. Canine food, supplies, and equipment shall be secured by the Canine Handler as needed using approved Departmental purchasing procedures. Supervisory approval must be obtained for any expenses exceeding established spending guidelines. Approved purchases may also be made utilizing the respective Post/Unit/Section Purchasing Card.
4. The Canine Handler shall obtain the service of a local veterinarian as needed. Any expense involving veterinary services must be processed according to Departmental guidelines.

5. The Canine Handler is responsible for the acquisition of the rabies tags, upkeep of vaccinations, and compliance with all state, county, and city ordinances regarding licensing of their canines. The records will be maintained in the canine's diary. The Department's purchasing procedures will be used for the required fees.
6. Kennel Boarding may be authorized for canines if a Canine Handler would be unable to provide adequate care for his/her assigned canine for an extended period, including leave for vacation or illness. A request for kennel boarding must be pre-approved in writing by the Deputy Director. Civilian kennels may be used for Service Canines and must meet minimum state certification standards.
7. Adult family members or other qualified adults may provide short term care for a Department canine in the Handler's absence only after being properly instructed by the member on correct handling procedures.
8. In an emergency medical situation, the Canine Handler or designee shall ensure that the canine receives immediate medical attention. After medical attention has been rendered to the canine, the Canine Handler shall forward a memorandum, through the chain of command to the Commissioner, or his designee, describing the incident that caused the need for emergency medical attention. If treatment would exceed established spending limits, verbal supervisory approval shall be received before services are rendered, if practicable.
9. The Canine Handler shall be responsible for the administration of any medication as prescribed by the veterinarian after the canine has been released from the veterinary establishment.
10. Canine medical examinations shall be conducted annually and as needed should an injury or illness occur.
11. The Handler shall ensure their assigned canine always wears a soft collar with identification tags. The identification tag shall include the canine's name and 24-hour communication phone number for the Troop C Communications Center.
12. Members assigned the responsibility of Canine Handler are scheduled an additional 14 hours during each 28-day roster for the responsibilities associated with the health, maintenance, handling, and grooming of their canines. These hours shall be recorded on the appropriate activity/time sheets every Sunday on a 4/3/4/3 basis. The time shall be carried under the "OTHER NON-ENFORCEMENT HOURS" area.
13. Exercising and training of canines shall be conducted with the canine on lead unless the Handler determines that there are no risks present with having their canine off lead. The Handler shall take into consideration the presence of any other animals or persons in the area, and the possibility of their canine escaping their control before allowing them off lead.
14. Handlers are responsible for cleaning and properly discarding any mess caused by their canines, including feces dropped in public areas or on private property.

J. Required Equipment

1. Canine Vehicles:
 - a. Canine Handlers shall be assigned a vehicle furnished for canine transport.

- b. When the Canine Vehicle is not available, a suitable Department vehicle shall be furnished.
 - c. A Canine Vehicle must be locked, secured, and at a safe interior temperature when the canine is left in the vehicle and the Handler is not present.
 - d. Canine Vehicles shall be maintained in a clean and healthy condition for the canine and are subject to routine inspections by the Deputy Director.
 - e. Mechanical problems of Canine Vehicles shall be addressed as soon as possible. Prolonged or recurring mechanical problems shall be brought to the attention of the Fleet Manager. If the Canine Vehicle cannot be repaired to a satisfactory state, the Fleet Manager should arrange for a replacement vehicle as soon as practicable to preserve the safety of the canine. No canine should be transported in a vehicle that is known to have a clogged catalytic converter or defective temperature monitoring system.
2. Each Canine Handler shall be issued the following equipment:
- a. Lead of appropriate length;
 - b. Collar/harness as appropriate for duty assignment and trained Discipline(s);
 - c. Kennel for the Canine Handler's residence (Note: the kennel shall remain the property of the Department and shall be kept clean and always disinfected. The kennel will be subject to on-site inspections);
 - d. Optional kennel for the assigned Post/Office;
 - e. Grooming/care equipment;
 - f. Vehicle equipment with temperature monitoring system, and tinted windows, and
 - g. Training aids and other equipment as deemed necessary.
3. Canine Handlers will be responsible for the care and maintenance of all equipment issued to them for training and control of the canine.

K. Assignment of Handlers and Reassignment of Canines

- 1. The duration of a Handler's assignment to the Canine Program shall be limited to the working life of their assigned canine. A Handler's continued assignment to the Canine Program beyond the working life of an assigned canine shall only be allowed with the written recommendation of the Commissioner or his designee.
- 2. In the event a Handler leaves the Canine Program for reasons including but not limited to promotion, change in assignment, or retirement from the Department, the canine may be reassigned to a new Handler. The Director, with the recommendation of the Deputy Director, will consider the likelihood of the canine's future abilities and make determinations which are most beneficial for the Department.

L. Canine Team Deactivation and Reactivation

1. A Canine Team's failure to participate, perform adequately, or successfully complete the required monthly maintenance, in-service training, or annual certifications may result in the Canine Team being removed from service or the Handler being removed from the Canine Program.
2. Unsatisfactory performance of the Handler or canine found during initial training, maintenance training, evaluations, or certifications shall be reviewed with the Deputy Director and the Director.
3. The Director may recommend removal of a Canine Team from active service if a severe deficiency is identified. A severe deficiency may include, but is not limited to any one of the following:
 - a. Canine does not respond to training.
 - b. Aggressive behavior or temperament displayed toward Departmental personnel or the public.
 - c. Any medical or genetic problems preventing the canine from physically performing his/her trained tasks.
 - d. The capabilities of the canine are hindered by the relationship or rapport with its Handler.
4. A deactivated Canine Team shall be allowed a reasonable period of time to be brought back up to established standards.

M. Retirement of Canines

1. Canines shall be retired from service upon exceeding their useful life as state property, at which time they shall be considered of no value to the Department.
2. Recommendations for retirement may be initiated by the Handler, Deputy Director, Director, or veterinarian. Recommendations shall, with proper supporting documentation, be forwarded through channels to the Commissioner for final action.
3. Upon the retirement from service of Department canines due to age or other reasons, the Handler shall be provided with the option of adoption of the canine. Should the Handler decline, disposition of the animal shall be at the discretion of the Commissioner. In determining placement of the canine, preference shall be given to homes over placements in animal shelters or other temporary housing.
4. Canines shall not be destroyed upon retirement from service unless necessary due to medical conditions or if required by law.

N. Death of a Canine

1. The death of a canine while on active-duty status will be reported through channels from the Director to the Commissioner or his designee.
2. Any suspicious or special circumstances shall be properly investigated by the Department.
3. Line of Duty deaths shall receive the special recognition that such a sacrifice shall warrant.

4. For Line of Duty deaths, the canine remains shall be respectfully interred at a location to be determined by the Handler with approval of the Director. Internment on State property may be authorized if requested.

O. Reports

The following reports shall be completed and filed in the appropriate location:

1. A Canine Training Record shall be completed each time a canine completes a training session. A copy of this training record shall be maintained by the Canine Handler in a permanent diary and submitted to the Deputy Director.
2. Certification Records shall be maintained in a permanent diary.
3. All records pertaining to a canine will be maintained by the current Canine Handler. When a canine is assigned a new Handler, a photocopy of all existing records will be transferred to the new Handler.
4. All canine records shall be retained in compliance with the Department's Records Retention Schedule.