

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5321

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Judiciary, February 27, 2001

Title: An act relating to creating a certification process and oversight mechanism for police service dog teams.

Brief Description: Creating a certification process and oversight mechanism for police service dog teams.

Sponsors: Senators Costa, Roach, Kline, McCaslin, Long, Hargrove, Thibaudeau, Zarelli, Constantine and Haugen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 1/30/01, 2/27/01 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5321 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Kline, Chair; Constantine, Vice Chair; Costa, Hargrove, Johnson, Kastama, Long, McCaslin, Roach and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Lidia Mori (786-7755)

Background: There are no mandatory minimum performance standards for police service dogs and their handlers in Washington State. The Washington Administrative Code requires dog handlers to complete training targeted to the particular function the police dog will perform. For example, generalist police dog handlers must complete at least 390 hours of training. However, there is no required amount of training of police dogs and no process in place to determine whether the handler and his or her dog can in fact perform to an acceptable level.

Police service dogs are sometimes recycled due to problems encountered in one agency or department. There is concern that complete records do not necessarily follow the dog, so one agency in Washington may purchase a dog from another agency and not know the history of the dog. In addition, private vendors may accept one of their dogs back from an agency only to resell it to another agency, again without providing the full background of the dog.

Summary of Substitute Bill: After March 1, 2003, law enforcement agencies may utilize only police service dogs and handlers that are certified as teams, except for detection dogs which are exempt from the certification requirement. The Criminal Justice Training Commission is directed to develop a minimum performance standard for each category of police service dog and handler, establish minimum training hours for police dogs and handlers, and implement a certification process. A canine training standards board is created by the commission to assist in setting minimum performance standards and to review disputes

relating to the certification of police service dog teams. A process is created for complaints regarding the certification of police service dog teams. The board will cease to exist after the performance standards are developed and adopted by the commission.

Every police service dog used by law enforcement or any state or local governmental agency must be identified by a microchip. The commission must develop and manage a centralized data base of information pertaining to all police service dogs used by state and local governmental agencies in Washington. The information required to be kept in the database is specified in the bill. Some information relating to the type of training of certain police service dogs is exempt from public inspection and copying.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill requires law enforcement agencies, after March 1, 2003, to utilize only police service dogs and handlers that are certified as teams. The substitute bill exempts police service detection dogs from the certification requirement. It also directs the canine training standards board to examine the option of requiring certification of detection dogs and make a recommendation to the Criminal Justice Training Commission. This board will cease to exist after the performance standards are developed and adopted by the commission.

Appropriation: Unspecified.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on August 1, 2001.

Testimony For: There are currently no statewide training or performance standards for police service dogs and their handlers. Only 50 percent of the K9 units in this state have taken advantage of the voluntary standards that exist. The safety of the public is at issue. By requiring performance standards to be met, the liability of counties and cities that use police dog teams should decrease.

Testimony Against: Drug dogs should be excluded.

Testified: Senator Costa; Rick Bart, Snohomish County Sheriff's Office (pro); Michael Parsons, Director of the Criminal Justice Training Center (pro); Steven Weigley (pro); Tim Tieken (pro); Stacey Connole, Washington State Association of Counties (pro); Bill Hansen, John Stanley, WACOPS (con).