

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1108

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Judiciary, March 20, 2003

Title: An act relating to establishing penalties for harming a police horse.

Brief Description: Establishing penalties for harming a police horse.

Sponsors: Representatives Chase, DeBolt, Lovick, Ahern, Moeller, Blake, McCoy, Eickmeyer, Sump, O'Brien, Mielke and Haigh.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 3/20/03 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chair; Esser, Vice Chair; Brandland, Haugen, Kline and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Lidia Mori (786-7755)

Background: Police horses are generally selected based on their friendliness and calmness to be able to stand firm through gunfire, riots, smoke, flares, parades, funerals, bottle rockets, squealing children, speeding traffic, and other obstacles. They are often used by law enforcement officers for crowd control, spotting impending crimes from far away distances, and for search and rescue missions. They are also found to patrol more effectively than officers on foot or motorized vehicles in certain situations.

Unlike dogs which are often used for law enforcement purposes, police horses are not protected by a criminal statute. A person is guilty of harming a police or accelerant dog if the person maliciously injures, disables, shoots, or kills a dog that the person knows or has reason to know is a police or accelerant dog. Harming a police dog is an unranked class C felony. The maximum sentence for unranked felonies is one year of confinement, along with possible community service, legal financial obligations, community supervision, and a fine.

Summary of Bill: Police horses used by law enforcement officers are protected by the same criminal statute which prohibits the injuring or killing of police and accelerant dogs. If a person maliciously injures, disables, shoots, or kills a police horse when the person knows or has reason to know the horse is a police horse, the person is guilty of an unranked class C felony. The horse does not have to be engaged in police work when the person injures or kills the horse.

"Police horse" is defined as any horse used or kept for use in discharging any legal duty or power of a law enforcement officer.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: There are some local ordinances that protect horses used in law enforcement but this bill will provide a consistent approach to such protection. By enhancing protection for the horse, the rider's safety is also increased. Police horses are very useful in areas not accessible to motorized vehicles.

Testimony Against: None

Testified: Rep. Marilyn Chase; Shefveland, Kenneth, Snohomish County Sheriff's Office.