

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

March 3, 2021

Jerry Stokes  
Chief of Police  
Salisbury Police DepartmentVia e-mail: [jstok@salisburync.gov](mailto:jstok@salisburync.gov)

Dear Chief Stokes:

Our office is being flooded with calls from people in North Carolina and beyond who are understandably outraged by a now-viral [video](#) that depicts a man identified as a Salisbury Police Department canine handler hanging and punching a K9 officer. The handler is seen lifting the dog off the ground by a leash around the neck, swinging the animal over his shoulder, hauling the dog in this “choke hold” for several feet, slamming the dog against the side of a police vehicle, shoving the dog roughly against and into the vehicle, and punching the dog with force.

The men apparently inside the vehicle with the camera that filmed the incident can be heard in the footage: One says, “We’re good—no witnesses.” Then someone chuckles. Then one asks, “Is your camera on?” and the response is “No, man, my power’s off.” Someone then says, “I think mine’s on,” followed by “Can you go flip my cameras off? Just the front camera.” Clearly, these witnesses knew that the handler’s actions were wrong, cruel, and—we believe—in violation of the law. Unfortunately, no one tried to stop the abuse. Dogs do their best to please and to understand what is required of them, and they’re extremely loyal. The cruelty inflicted on the dog in the video is a violation of that trust and, in our view, a criminal act: The incident depicted in the footage may constitute cruelty to animals per [N.C.G.S.A. § 14-360](#). Law-enforcement animals are also protected by [N.C.G.S.A. § 14-163.1](#), which stipulates that anyone who willfully causes or attempts to cause them harm is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

News reports have identified the K9 as Zuul. The public is being told that the handler has been “administratively separated” from the dog while the incident is being investigated. Your official statement to the public is that you could not comment about the details of the video because it’s a “[personnel matter](#).” You stated that Zuul was “[not harmed and is healthy and being well-cared-for](#),” but there was no indication that he was examined by a veterinarian, which should have occurred immediately following the abuse. Additionally, you stated that “[K9](#)

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[training tactics and corrective measures can sometimes be alarming when provided out of context.](#)” Respectfully, the “out of context” argument does not hold water here. **There is no scenario in which this handler’s behavior could be considered acceptable by any standard, and we believe this is far more than an internal disciplinary matter. It is criminal conduct.** Furthermore, witnesses who took no action and in fact engaged in a cover-up of this incident must also be investigated for collusion, aiding, and abetting. They also bear some responsibility for this dog’s suffering.

Your comments to the media also suggest that this sort of abusive treatment is not out of the ordinary in your department. We urge you to conduct a thorough review of K9 handler policies and training. The agency’s K9s deserve to be treated with the same respect as any other officers who put their lives on the line protecting the residents of Salisbury. And they are required by law to be treated without cruelty.

PETA works with and supports police departments all over the nation, often collaborating to investigate, charge, and prosecute animal abusers. Given heightened awareness of police officer conduct, we trust that you will do the right thing and take strong department-wide action, sending the message that the type of violence shown in this viral video will not be tolerated. Otherwise, this handler’s vicious behavior and that of those who witnessed the abuse and hoped it wouldn’t be discovered will dominate the public’s perception of your department’s work.

We join the North Carolinians who have contacted our office in hoping to see the handler permanently reassigned to another division, barred from interaction with K9s or other animals, and prosecuted for cruelty to animals.

Thank you for your consideration and for all that you do to keep the community safe and humane. I look forward to hearing from you and can be reached at [AllisonF@peta.org](mailto:AllisonF@peta.org).

With great respect,



Allison Fandl  
CID Manager, Cruelty Investigations Department