



August 6, 2024

To: Barry Shepherd, Executive Director
Jack L. Rinchich, President
Brian Smith, Senior Vice President
John Kucan, National Outreach Chair
National Association of Chiefs of Police

From: Allison Fandl, Manager of Special Projects, PETA

Subject: Discontinuation and Replacement of K-9 Units in Law Enforcement

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals U.S. (PETA) is the largest animal rights organization in the world, and PETA entities have more than 9 million members and supporters globally. In the U.S., PETA works with and supports law-enforcement agencies across the nation, often collaborating to investigate, charge, and prosecute animal abusers. We appreciate and respect the difficult and thankless work performed by officers day and night, often in the face of grave danger. For more than a decade, we have campaigned to reduce the number of [tragic deaths of K-9s in hot cars](#), encouraging the use of lifesaving equipment with state-of-the-art technology to protect these highly trained working dogs. As this safety equipment has become more widely implemented, the number of publicly reported hot-car deaths seems to have decreased. However, the number of incidents in which handlers have violently abused their own partners has dramatically increased.

We know that many handlers respect and value their K-9s, whom they trust with their lives in dangerous situations. But as camera phones and social media have become ubiquitous, more witnesses are speaking out against officers who mistreat their own partners, often with obvious rage and aggression. While some training methods considered “standard” for decades—such as hitting dogs with leather belts, submerging their heads underwater, and “helicoptering” them (that is, hanging them by a leash and spinning them in the air until they stagger around and vomit)—are now rightfully considered cruel and ineffective, many people don’t realize that modern training for “bite work” remains extremely violent and inherently abusive. Dogs are conditioned to understand that only biting will neutralize a perceived threat. They become “[loaded pistols](#)” ready to attack anyone who causes them fear or pain. Many suffer from [constant anxiety](#), and when they use their only means of self-defense against the “wrong” person, they are “corrected” with violence that causes more fear and pain, fueling confusion and further anxiety, damaging the bond that’s supposed to exist between a handler and a K-9.

The manner in which some handlers treat their partners would be considered criminal if not for a uniform—as demonstrated by the arrest in June of a former handler charged with [aggravated cruelty to animals](#) for striking and body-slammng his agency-assigned K-9, Nero, while they were off duty in Georgia.

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Just last week, an [18-year veteran](#) of the Prince George's County Police Department in Maryland was arrested on misdemeanor and felony [cruelty-to-animals](#) charges for abusing both of his department-assigned K-9s, a bloodhound named Daisy and a Belgian Malinois named Spartacus. Incidents like the recent cases of handlers striking their dogs in the face in public in [Fayetteville, North Carolina](#), and [Dayton, Ohio](#), are deeply upsetting for the communities that look to law-enforcement officers not only to uphold the law but also to act as role models.

Other dogs have died from entirely preventable causes while off duty, including [K-9 Nitro](#), who died after spending the weekend in an outdoor kennel while temperatures reached 114 degrees in Coalinga, California, and [K-9 Luca](#), who died as a result of being left in a fenced backyard during record-breaking temperatures with a heat index of 110 degrees in Katy, Texas. Sometimes, safety equipment fails to activate and dogs left alone in patrol cars for hours die of heatstroke, like [K-9 Vader](#) of Arnold, Missouri. Even K-9s with the most considerate and protective handlers are at risk of significant injury and death on duty, as illustrated by the recent tragic deaths of [K-9 Archer](#), who collapsed after pursuing a suspect on a 95-degree day in Madison County, Florida, and [K-9 Cobra](#), who was fatally shot while his South Carolina Law Enforcement Division team members were serving a felony warrant. Archer's and Cobra's handlers are now mourning the loss of their respected partners.

For the safety and well-being of all officers and the communities they serve, PETA encourages law-enforcement agencies to consider alternatives to using K-9s. Progressive departments are using tactical robots proven to [enhance safety and operational efficiency](#) without risking anyone's life. Agencies, including the [New York City Police Department](#), the [Massachusetts State Police](#), and the [Houston Police Department](#), deploy such devices in situations that involve armed suspects and could otherwise result in serious injury or death for both K-9s and human officers. Agencies have used donations, grant money, and federal funding to offset the cost of tactical robot dogs, which typically ranges from around \$75,000 to \$250,000, depending on the device's capabilities.

We hope you'll bring this important matter to the attention of your members and support them in transitioning from the use of K-9s to alternative tactics and technology.

Thank you for your consideration. I can be reached at AllisonF@peta.org. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Most respectfully,



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