

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Criminal Justice

BILL: SB 96

INTRODUCER: Senator Bean and others

SUBJECT: Police, Fire, and Search and Rescue Dogs

DATE: February 1, 2019

REVISED: 02/08/19

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Storch	Jones	CJ	Pre-meeting
2.			JU	
3.			RC	

I. Summary:

SB 96 increases the penalty from a third degree felony to a second degree felony for intentionally and knowingly, without lawful cause or justification, causing great bodily harm, permanent disability, or death to, or using a deadly weapon upon, a police canine, fire canine, or search and rescue (SAR) canine. Additionally, the bill makes the corresponding changes to the offense severity ranking chart.

The bill also replaces every instance of the word “dog” with the word “canine” in s. 843.19, F.S.

The Legislature’s Office of Economic and Demographic Research preliminarily estimates that the bill would result in a “positive insignificant” prison bed impact (10 or fewer prison beds). See Section V. Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill is effective October 1, 2019.

II. Present Situation:

Law enforcement and fire department special K-9 and mounted units

Specially-trained dogs are utilized by various agencies and departments throughout the state in their K-9 units. In 2017, there were 140 police departments and 65 sheriff’s offices with active canine units.¹ These departments employ dogs to assist with tracking and apprehending offenders, narcotics and bomb detection,² and building and article searches.³ Additionally, some

¹ Information provided by email from Amy Mercer, Executive Director, The Florida Police Chiefs Association (January 15, 2019) (on file with Senate Criminal Justice Committee).

² City of Orlando, *K-9 Unit*, available at <http://www.cityoforlando.net/police/k-9-unit/> (last visited January 24, 2019).

³ St. Petersburg Police Department, *K-9 Unit*, available at <http://police.stpete.org/usb/k-9.html> (last visited January 24, 2019).

fire departments utilize dogs as part of arson detection programs.⁴ Various non-profit organizations also use dogs for the purpose of SAR, such as the Community Emergency Response Team, which provides support to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.⁵

Though not as frequently used as K-9 units, select law enforcement agencies throughout the state have mounted units,⁶ whereby specially-trained horses are used to assist with crowd control, special events, and additional patrol functions, among other tasks.⁷

Offenses against police animals

Police dogs are often deployed by their handlers to chase after fleeing felons in high-intensity situations. As a result, the dogs can be caught in the line of fire while on the job. Two recent incidents resulted in the death of a police dog while the dog was on duty. In September 2018, 3-year old Fang, a member of Jacksonville Sheriff's Office canine unit, was shot and killed by a teenager who was fleeing a scene after carjacking two women at a gas station minutes earlier.⁸ Similarly, in December 2018, Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office's canine, 3-year-old Cigo, was shot and killed by an attempted murder suspect outside of a shopping mall.⁹

Protecting police animals from intentional harm

In an effort to deter intentional harm toward police animals, legislation aimed at creating stiffer penalties for such crimes has been introduced at both the federal and state level. In August 2000, Congress passed the Federal Law Enforcement Animal Protection Act of 2000, which made it a crime to willfully and maliciously harm a police animal, or attempt or conspire to do so, resulting in a penalty of imprisonment for up to one year. Additionally, permanently disabling or causing serious bodily injury or death to a police animal would result in a term of imprisonment of up to 10 years under the act.¹⁰

⁴ City of Orlando, *Accelerant Detection Canines*, available at <http://www.cityoforlando.net/fire/accelerant-detection-canines/> (last visited January 24, 2019).

⁵ Boondocks K9 SAR-CERT Unit, *Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)*, available at <https://www.boondocksk9.org/> (last visited January 24, 2019).

⁶ The following agencies have mounted units: Escambia County Sheriff's Office see <http://www.escambiaso.com/mounted-unit/>; Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office see <http://www.hcso.tampa.fl.us/A-Z-Directory/M/Mounted-Unit.aspx>; Key West Police Department see <https://www.cityofkeywest-fl.gov/departments/division.php?structureid=147>; Marion County Sheriff's Office see <http://www.marionso.com/mounted-unit/>; Orlando Police Department see <http://www.cityoforlando.net/police/mounted-patrol/>; Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office see <https://www.pbso.org/services/countywide-operations/mounted-unit/>; Pinellas Park Police Department see <https://www.pinellas-park.com/642/Mounted-Patrol>; and St. Petersburg Police Department see <http://police.stpete.org/usb/mounted-unit.html> (last visited January 25, 2019).

⁷ City of Orlando, *Mounted Patrol*, available at <http://www.cityoforlando.net/police/mounted-patrol/> (last visited January 24, 2019).

⁸ Colette DuChanois and Tarik Minor, *Audio, video evidence released in case of teen held in K-9's death*, NEWS4JAX, November 12, 2018, available at <https://www.news4jax.com/news/local/jacksonville/new-evidence-details-case-against-teen-accused-of-killing-jso-k-9> (last visited January 24, 2019).

⁹ Mark Osborne and Jason M. Volack, *Suspect kills police dog in shootout outside mall on Christmas eve, police say*, ABC NEWS, December 25, 2018, available at <https://abcnews.go.com/US/suspect-kills-police-dog-shootout-mall-christmas-eve/story?id=60007552> (last visited January 24, 2019).

¹⁰ 18 U.S.C.A. s. 1368 (2002).

Similar efforts to increase penalties for such crimes have been attempted at the state level as well. In Utah, legislation was introduced in 2018 to increase the penalty from a third degree felony to a second degree felony for intentionally or knowingly causing death to a police dog.¹¹ Additionally, in South Carolina, legislation in 2018 named after two police dogs that were killed in the line of duty¹² proposed to increase the penalty for harming a police animal to a maximum prison sentence of 10 years and a potential \$10,000 fine.¹³ Current Michigan law provides that a person who intentionally kills or causes serious physical harm to a police dog, police horse, or SAR dog is guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment of up to 5 years, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both.¹⁴

Currently, Florida law provides that it is a third degree felony¹⁵ to intentionally and knowingly, without lawful cause or justification, cause great bodily harm, permanent disability, or death to, or use a deadly weapon upon a police dog, police horse, fire dog, or SAR dog.¹⁶ Those animals have specific definitions in law and are defined in the following manner:

- “Police dog” and “police horse” means any dog or horse, respectively, that is owned, or the service of which is employed, by a law enforcement agency for the principal purpose of aiding in the detection of criminal activity, enforcement of laws, or apprehension of offenders;
- “Fire dog” means any dog that is owned, or the service of which is employed, by a fire department, a special fire district, or the State Fire Marshal for the principal purpose of aiding in the detention of flammable materials or the investigation of fires; and
- “SAR dog” means any search and rescue dog that is owned, or the service of which is employed, by a fire department, a law enforcement agency, a special fire district, or the State Fire Marshal for the principal purpose of aiding in the detection of missing persons, including, but not limited to, persons who are lost, who are trapped under debris as the result of a natural, manmade, or technological disaster, or who are drowning victims.¹⁷

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill increases the penalty from a third degree felony to a second degree felony¹⁸ for intentionally and knowingly, without lawful cause or justification, causing great bodily harm, permanent disability, or death to, or using a deadly weapon upon, a police canine, fire canine, or SAR canine. The penalty for committing the same crime against a police horse remains a third degree felony.

¹¹ 2018 General Session, state of Utah, S.B. 57 (2018).

¹² Tim Smith, *Police dog protection: Stiffer penalty proposed for harming K-9s*, GREENVILLE NEWS, February 13, 2018, available at <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/south-carolina/2018/02/13/police-dog-protection-stiffer-penalty-proposed-harming-k-9-s/332391002/> (last visited January 24, 2019).

¹³ 122nd Session, South Carolina General Assembly, S. 6 (2017-18).

¹⁴ MICHIGAN COMPILED LAWS ANN. s. 750.50c.

¹⁵ Section 843.19(2), F.S. A third degree felony is punishable by a state prison term not exceeding 5 years, a fine not exceeding \$5,000, or both. Sections 775.082(3)(e) and 775.083(1)(c), F.S.

¹⁶ Section 843.19(2), F.S.

¹⁷ Section 843.19(1)(a)-(c), F.S.

¹⁸ A second degree felony is punishable by a state prison term not exceeding 15 years, a fine not exceeding \$10,000, or both. Sections 775.082(3)(d) and 775.083(1)(b), F.S.

Additionally, the bill replaces every instance of the word “dog” with the word “canine” in s. 843.19, F.S.

The bill makes these corresponding changes to the offense severity ranking chart.¹⁹

The bill is effective October 1, 2019.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None identified.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Criminal Justice Impact Conference, which provides the final, official prison bed impact, if any, of legislation has not yet reviewed this bill. However, a preliminary estimate prepared by the Legislature’s Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) predicted that this bill would result in a “positive insignificant” prison bed impact (10 or fewer prison beds). In fiscal year 2017-18, one person was sentenced pursuant to s. 843.19, F.S., and no offenders were sentenced to prison.²⁰

¹⁹ Section 921.0022, F.S.

²⁰ Information provided by EDR staff (on file with the Senate Criminal Justice Committee).

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 843.19 and 921.0022.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.