


NORTHAMPTON POLICE DEPARTMENT		
Administration & Operations Manual		
Policy: Comfort Dog Team		AOM: P-125.d
Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards Referenced: [41.1.4,a] [41.1.4,b] [41.1.4, c]		Issuing Authority <hr/> John D. Cartledge Chief of Police
Dissemination Date: 3/7/2019	Amended:	
Effective Date: 3/11/2019	Reviewed: 3/19, 8/22, 3/26	

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I. General Considerations and Guidelines

- A. The trained Comfort Dog is a valuable supplement to Northampton Police Department resources. The function of the Comfort Dog is to provide interaction during investigations involving children or adults to reduce anxiety and increase communication between the adult or child victim/witness and investigators, to provide comfort for people during times of crisis, and to provide aid and comfort to individuals, groups and communities impacted by violence, tragedy, or traumatic events.

- B. The Comfort Dog is also a valuable tool in fostering dialog and communications between the police department and the community we serve. The Comfort Dog can effectively be used in the Department's community policing efforts.

II. Purpose

- A. The purpose of this operation directive is to establish procedure and regulations governing the deployment, training, evaluation, and use of a Comfort Dog, and to define the authority, circumstances, and responsibility for their use.

III. Policy

- A. When available, the comfort dog and handler will aid with criminal investigations with a focus on adult and children DCF investigations, missing persons, sex crimes, child abductions, child exploitation internet crimes, public education about the comfort program, utilizing the comfort dog to help victims feel more at ease while speaking about their situation, and/or to comfort individuals or groups that have experienced a traumatic event.
- B. Administrative supervision of the comfort dog handler, for purposes of selection, training and maintenance of the comfort dog, re-assignment and equipment, will be provided by the Chief or their designee.

IV. Comfort Dog Applications [41.1.4, a]

- A. General Uses for the Comfort Dog Team

- 1. Aid in the investigation where there is a child victim of abuse

- a. Prior to a forensic interview the Comfort Dog Team may meet with the child victim/witness in the lobby or waiting area of the building where the child will be interviewed to reduce anxiety while the interviewer prepares for the interview. The Comfort Dog Handler will also have the opportunity to engage the child in conversation, which may help the child feel more comfortable talking to an unfamiliar adult. This interaction will also help the handler assess the child's developmental capabilities prior to the interview.
- b. Forensic interview aid of a child victim is at the interviewer's discretion. If the Comfort Dog is used in the interview, the handler is to only perform the duties of handling the Comfort Dog and allow the interviewer to engage in communication with the child.

- 2. Trial testimony of a child victim/witness

Like the procedures for forensic interviews and prosecutor deployments, the Comfort Dog team may be used in the waiting area prior to testimony.

3. Critical Incident Mental Health Support

The Comfort Dog Team can help bridge the gap between a traumatic event and the connection to mental health support. A compassionate presence leveraging the human-canine bond may help restore a person's emotional and cognitive equilibrium. The first contact with an impacted individual is important. If managed in a respectful and compassionate way, it can help establish an effective helping relationship and increase the person's receptiveness to further help.

4. Critical Incident Stress Management

The Comfort Dog Team is authorized to aid the Western Massachusetts Critical Incident Stress Management (WMCISM) Team with Debriefing or Diffusing First Responders who were involved in a traumatic event within the WMCISM response area, as requested.

5. School Support

The Comfort Dog team may be utilized to assist school officials during time of mental health crisis, bereavement counseling, or any other appropriate request from the local school districts. This request will be done by the School administration contacting the SRO and requesting the deployment of the comfort dog team.

6. Community Relations

Requests for demonstrations or visits will be routed to the Community Services Supervisor. All requests will be made far enough in advance to ensure that a Comfort Dog team will be available.

V. Authorization, Limitations, Deployment and Use

- A. Only officers and dogs authorized by the Chief of Police or their designee will perform the duties of a Comfort Dog team. [41.1.4, a]
- B. No one shall engage with the Comfort Dog unless authorized by the facilitator. [41.1.4,a]
- C. When the Comfort Dog has the vest on, it is working and should not be distracted. It will be the responsibility of the handler to educate the employees and public when they can or cannot interact with the comfort dog. [41.1.4,a]
- D. No one shall feed anything to the Comfort Dog without the handler's permission. [41.1.4,a]
- E. Only the facilitator, or person designated by the facilitator, can give the Comfort Dog a cue or command. [41.1.4,a]
- F. The Comfort Dog is not trained to defend itself. It will not be used as a less lethal tool for the department. It shall not be asked to perform a task it is not trained in (such as

drug recognition, patrol defense, crowd control or tracking). As such, prior to using the Comfort Dog, the location must be safe and secure for the team. Final approval for the deployment of the team, including location and time, will rest with the handler. No discipline will be sought for the refusal of the handler to deploy his/her team due to safety considerations. [41.1.4,a]

- G. Comfort Dog teams may be deployed at times and locations that provide optimal response throughout the City of Northampton. Requests to deploy the Comfort Dog Team outside the city jurisdiction should be coordinated through the Community Services Supervisor.
- H. In order for the Comfort Dog team to be most effective, their use is designed for cases in which there are reasons to believe the allegations of abuse are present, during the times of mental health crisis, or during the immediate aftermath of a critical incident.
 - 1. In situations where a child is located at an active crime scene, when the suspect is present or living in the child's home, when there is a prior history of the child not disclosing details of abuse, or when there is evidence supporting the need for an immediate removal of the child, the Comfort Dog team would be responsible for creating a positive distraction in order to remove the child without further traumatizing or increasing anxiety.
 - 2. The Comfort Dog team can be used to diffuse a mental health crisis by distracting and refocusing the effected person to a positive interaction.
 - 3. In situations of an active critical incident or immediate aftermath thereof, the Comfort Dog team would be responsible for creating a positive distraction as well comforting survivors prior to mental health service involvement or the use of a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team.
- I. The department shall be responsible for reasonable veterinarian treatment for an owner/handler Comfort Dog injured while being used in performance of their duties by no fault of the handler. The owner/handler shall be responsible for the cost of feeding, shelter, regular veterinary expenses, and upkeep of their personally owned dog. The city will agree to cover the liability of the dog while it is performing official duties. [41.1.4,c]

VI. Comfort Dog Reporting Procedures

- A. Use of the Comfort Dog will be explained by the handler in writing via the agency's Record Management System (RMS) and any other documenting requirements as appropriate. All completed reports will be forwarded to the investigating officer.
- B. The Comfort Dog handler maintains all Comfort Dog training records. These training records will also be forwarded to the Training Supervisor for entry into the Comfort Dog handler's training files.
- C. If a Comfort Dog injures any person (child, suspect, citizen, or officer):

1. The handler shall ensure that proper medical treatment is received by the person who was injured as soon as possible.
2. The handler will notify the Chief of Police or their designee.
3. The handler and the Comfort Dog handler's supervisor shall examine all injuries.
4. All injuries will be photographed, when applicable, regardless of the suspected nature of the injury. Photos will be submitted with the Report.
5. It is the responsibility of the Comfort Dog handler's supervisor to investigate the report and attach all supporting documentation, which is to be forwarded to the Chief of Police or their designee.

VII. Transporting Comfort Dogs

- A. Comfort Dog handlers may use modified department issued vehicles for transporting the Comfort Dog. Handlers may carry refreshments for the Comfort Dog in the vehicle. The Comfort Dog shall not be left unaccompanied in a vehicle that is not equipped with a heat sensor. The Comfort Dog will be accompanied by the handler at all times.
- B. Additional equipment
 1. Window tinting – The rear deck/gate and rear door windows may be tinted to a much darker shade than normal in order to assist in keeping the vehicle cool. This can cause significantly decreased vision to the sides and rear especially in low light or no light situations. Members must remember this when backing, turning or changing lanes.
 2. Use – Arrestees will not be transported with a Comfort Dog in the vehicle.

VIII. Training Of Comfort Dogs [41.1.4, b]

- A. Comfort Dog teams will receive initial training and/or proficiency testing and/or re-training in accordance with a nationally recognized comfort, crisis dog organization or other certifying association approved by the Chief of Police or their designee. A puppy may be used as a Comfort Dog while it is undergoing training as long as it has been evaluated and approved by the Chief of Police or their designee.
- B. Comfort Dog teams will train on a regular basis to maintain proficiency and operational readiness. Additionally, the Comfort Dog team will undergo a demonstration of proficiency on a yearly basis under the supervision of a nationally recognized comfort or crisis dog organization.
- C. The Comfort Dog Handler, or Supervisor will ensure that the above training is conducted as indicated, and will ensure that the training records are maintained for each Comfort Dog team by the Training Coordinator.

IX. Qualifications and Selection Of Comfort Dog Handlers

- A. Members must have a minimum of two full years from the completion of their probationary period with the Northampton Police Department.

- B. The Comfort Dog Handler candidate's residence must be capable of housing the Comfort Dog and/or have adequate space for the construction of a kennel, since the member will be required to keep the Comfort Dog at his/her residence. In the event the member does not own the property, the member must obtain written permission from the property owner for housing the Comfort Dog. In addition, there will be an interview of the Comfort Dog candidates' family (if applicable).
- C. The Comfort Dogs Handler Candidate shall have the following minimum training [41.1.4, b]:
 - 1. Full Time Police Academy
 - 2. Mental Health First Aid; CIT training or its equivalent
 - 3. Individual and Group Crisis, or GRIN training from the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation or its equivalent
 - 4. Suicide Prevention
 - 5. ICS 100 and NIMS 700
- D. The Comfort Dog Handler Candidate shall demonstrate at minimum three years prior experience working, training, and caring with dogs. Full-time ownership of a personal dog for three years is adequate.

X. Uniform and Equipment

- A. The Comfort Dog Handler shall wear:
 - 1. The authorized seasonally appropriate uniform and equipment of that of a patrol officer; or
 - 2. A subdued uniform which consists of tan or dark pants, and department approved collared shirt that displays an embroidered or printed badge and the officer's name.
 - 3. Handler must carry handcuffs and firearm.
 - 4. In some cases plain clothes may be appropriate and shall be approved by a supervisor.
- B. Anytime the general public has access to the Comfort Dog it shall be equipped and wear: [41.1.4,d]
 - 1. An appropriate collar and leash, no longer than 6 feet
 - 2. A vest or harness marked "POLICE". The vest or harness may be adorned with other appropriate patches, badges or mementos in relation to its service
 - 3. An appropriate sized kennel or safe place will be made available at the station for securing the dog indoors. Water will be made available for the dog while being kenneled or stored; the dog may not be kenneled or stored any longer than 4 hours without a break, except in cases of emergency.

XI. Disposition of Comfort Dogs

- A. Employee Owned Dog

The city shall not retain the dog that is owned by the handler. The owner/handler can stop using the dog at any time and at their choosing for any reason without penalty to the handler.

B. Retirement of City Owned Comfort Dog

Recommendations to retire a Comfort Dog for cause will be made through the chain of command. After consultation with the a veterinarian and an approved trainer the Chief of Police will make the recommendation as to whether or not the Comfort Dog may be retired to the care of the handler or stay in service. If it is determined that the Comfort Dog should be retired, the handler will have the option of adopting the dog, free of cost, for personal companionship.

1. Employee Leave

a. Employee-owned Dogs

In cases where a handler who owns a Comfort Dog leaves the department through resignation, injury, or retirement, the Comfort Dog shall remain with that Handler who owns the dog.

b. City-owned Dogs

In cases where a handler leaves the department through resignation, injury, or retirement, prior to five years of teamwork, and the Comfort Dog is owned by the City, the Comfort Dog will remain the property of the department. If the Comfort Dog is determined to be suitable for reassignment to a new handler, it shall be retained within the unit or sold to the original handler for the cost of a replacement dog. If the Comfort Dog is determined unsuitable for reassignment, the Comfort Dog shall be made available for adoption at no cost to the departing member, if so desired. If the handler declines adoption, the dog may be assigned to a new handler or be offered up for adoption to another as determined by the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

c. Dissolution of the Program

The Comfort Dog program may be stopped at any time by the Chief of Police or their designee or by the Handler.