

Asheville Police Department Policy Manual

Chapter: 5 - Law Enforcement Operations

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Policy: 517 - Therapy Dog Program

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Introduction

The function of the therapy dog is to provide aid and comfort to individuals, groups, and communities, including department members. Therapy canines will not receive training, nor are they intended for traditional police work.

Policy Statement

The Asheville Police Department (APD) will utilize trained therapy dogs to supplement department resources. The department will use the therapy dog program to encourage and cultivate positive relationships with the public through attendance at community events while also supporting department members and providing comfort for people during times of crisis.

Definitions

Therapy Dog: a dog utilized by the department trained to comfort people who need emotional support, and when utilized for community events or meetings, contributes to building trust and positive relationships between the police and the public.

Therapy Dog Handler: department member(s) designated by the department to care for the dog(s) and handle and/or deploy a therapy dog.

Therapy Dog Team: the therapy dog handler and their assigned therapy dog.

Rules and Procedures

517.1 Therapy Dog Use [41.1.4 a]

- A. The primary duty of therapy dog teams is to support the department's community engagement efforts and all department divisions, as appropriate. Examples of activities therapy dog teams may be assigned to, but are not limited to:
 1. Public events.
 2. Community outreach and engagement.
 3. Calls involving grief, loss, and trauma, as appropriate and when requested.
 4. Any other call where, in a supervisor's opinion, a therapy dog would be an asset.
- B. Supervisors may request a therapy dog team respond to a call for service via the Watch Commander. Requests outside a therapy dog team's regular duty hours will only be considered for extraordinary circumstances.
- C. Therapy dog handlers have the expertise to determine the proper utilization of their assigned dog(s) in any situation. If a handler declines to use their assigned dog in a specific situation, any questions should be directed to the therapy dog handler's immediate supervisor.
- D. The therapy dog is not trained to accomplish law enforcement objectives and will not be asked to perform a task it is not trained to do, such as drug detection or tracking.
- E. Therapy dog teams will not be utilized outside the city limits without prior authorization from a sworn supervisor, except for approved training.
- F. Before the deployment of a therapy dog, the handler must ensure the location is safe and appropriate for the presence of a dog.
 1. Therapy dogs do not have the same authorizations as service or emotional support dogs. Federal and state laws will dictate the locations a therapy dog may access.
 2. Owners of a private building or property have the right to request that the therapy dog not enter or leave at any time.

- G. The therapy dog should not run loose while attending public events.
- H. The therapy dog should remain available for department members to visit and interact with the dog. These interactions are not considered deployments.
- I. The therapy dog must be provided with appropriate breaks if attending extended events or activities, for example, walking outside or resting in a quiet space.
- J. The therapy dog handler will maintain accurate records and documentation about the dog's medical history, training history, and all therapy/outreach deployments.

517.2 Handler and Therapy Dog Selection

- A. The Training and Career Development Section is responsible for the selection process for therapy dog handlers in accordance with established departmental procedures; see [Policy 2103 - Specialized Assignments](#). Officers applying to be therapy dog handlers must, at a minimum:
 - 1. Have the willingness to remain a handler for at least the service life of the assigned therapy dog.
 - 2. Be willing and have the family support to care for and house the therapy dog in the officer's residence.
 - 3. Have the ability to perform routine handling and care for the therapy dog.
- B. The department will only select therapy dogs from reputable vendors. The canine supervisor or their designee will evaluate potential therapy dogs before purchasing by the department. The evaluator must have experience in training and handling canines.

517.3 Therapy Dog Care

- A. The therapy dog's primary handler is responsible for the daily care and overall welfare. The handler must immediately notify the canine supervisor of any changes that would affect the care and housing of their dog. [41.1.4 d]
- B. Therapy dogs will be housed and maintained at the residence of the primary handler.
- C. The department will be responsible for equipment, food, kennel, medical requirements, and any essential needs for the therapy dog.

- D. The department will be responsible for professional grooming as needed for therapy dogs.
- E. Routine veterinary attention, such as annual shots, flea and tick preventative, heartworm preventative, or checkups, does not require prior approval; however, the therapy dog handler's immediate supervisor must approve any extraordinary veterinary procedures.
- F. In the event of injury or illness to the therapy dog, on or off duty, the therapy dog handler will immediately notify their immediate supervisor. The handler is responsible for transporting the therapy dog to an approved veterinarian for evaluation and treatment.

517.4 Training and Equipment

- A. Members will train their assigned dog(s) and obtain certifications as directed by the department.
- B. Once the department acquires a therapy dog, it will be trained under the supervision of a certified canine trainer to standards set by the United States Police Canine Association (USPCA) before being deployed for official use. [41.1.4 c]
- C. Therapy dog handlers must attain certification from a nationally recognized canine association, such as but not limited to the USPCA. [41.1.4 b]
- D. Each therapy dog team must be evaluated and recertified at least annually.
- E. The therapy dog team will conduct at least four (4) hours of training per month. These sessions will be conducted to maintain and enhance the capabilities of the therapy dog and handler.
- F. In coordination with the Training and Career Development Section and the department's canine trainer, therapy dog handlers will maintain documentation of all therapy dog training activities, including therapy dog and handler training.
- G. Each therapy dog team will be issued or have access to the equipment necessary to care for and handle the dog. Examples of required specialized equipment items include, but are not limited to: [41.1.4 e]
 - 1. Leashes/food pouches
 - 2. Collar
 - 3. Vest with appropriate insignias

4. Kennels and feeding supplies

H. Therapy dog handlers will be assigned a permanent vehicle and canine vehicle safety equipment appropriate for the dog's transportation. The vehicle will be equipped with, at a minimum, an automated cooling system.

By order of:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Zack". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" and "Z".

David Zack
Chief of Police