# POLICY AND PROCEDURE NO. 402

# Comfort Dog Program

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## 1. PURPOSE:

The Worcester Police Department Comfort Dog Program is designed to support community engagement efforts, assist victims and witnesses, and promote wellness among department personnel and the community. This policy establishes clear guidelines governing the deployment, training, care, operational use, responsibilities, documentation, and overall management of the Program.

## 2. POLICY STATEMENT:

The Comfort Dog Program shall be implemented safely and professionally in a manner consistent with Department values, community policing strategies, and applicable laws. The Comfort Dog and its designated handler(s) shall be properly trained, supervised, and deployed to enhance community trust, reduce stress, and provide emotional support during times of trauma, crisis, or elevated stress. The Program is one component of the Department's community-oriented policing and crime prevention function, which is established in Policy 02 (Organizational Structure and Investigatory Responsibilities).

## 3. DEFINITIONS:

Comfort Dog: A professionally trained, non-enforcement canine used solely for emotional support, community engagement, stress reduction, and wellness activities. The dog shall not be used for apprehension, detection, or enforcement purposes.

Handler: A sworn member of the Worcester Police Department designated and trained to deploy, manage, transport, and care for the Comfort Dog.

## 4. AUTHORIZED USES:

The Comfort Dog may be deployed for the following purposes:

• Providing emotional and mental support to community members or first responders.

• Assisting victims, witnesses, or persons experiencing stress, trauma, or crisis during interviews or interactions with police personnel.

• Participating in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) interventions.

• Participating in public relations events, school visits, and community policing activities.

• Participating in community-oriented detail assignments where the Comfort Dog is actively serving its intended purpose.

• Any additional deployment authorized by the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

## 5. PROHIBITED AND RESTRICTED USES:

Officers and personnel shall adhere to the following restrictions:

• Only designated handlers may give verbal or physical commands to the Comfort Dog.

• Feeding the Comfort Dog by anyone other than the designated handler is prohibited unless specifically authorized by the handler.

• The Comfort Dog shall not be used for enforcement actions, detection of narcotics, explosives, or evidence, or for criminal apprehension or control.

• The handler has final discretion regarding deployment based on safety, environment, temperament, and suitability.

• The Comfort Dog shall not be deployed to detail assignments that are not community-oriented or do not support the program's intended purpose.

## 6. HANDLER REQUIREMENTS:

Handlers shall:

• Be selected by the Chief of Police.

• Have a minimum of three (3) years of experience as a Worcester Police Officer.

• Demonstrate strong communication skills, sound judgment, and effective community-policing ability.

• Complete Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), de-escalation training, and any approved comfort/crisis response canine certification program.

• Be responsible for the daily care, well-being, grooming, safety, and transportation of the Comfort Dog.

• Receive four (4) hours of overtime compensation per week for off-duty care, maintenance, and readiness responsibilities associated with the Comfort Dog.

## 7. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS:

• The Comfort Dog Team shall complete initial certification through Animal-Assisted Therapy Services (AATS) or another approved accredited comfort/crisis canine training organization.

• Ongoing training shall be conducted regularly to maintain proficiency, readiness, and certification requirements.

• Annual evaluations may be required at the discretion of the Chief of Police or designee.

• All training records shall be entered into the Packtrack software system.

• The comfort dog handler is a specialized assignment. The training and certification required for the position, and any recertification or in-service requirement, are listed in Policy and Procedure No. 145 (Departmental Training).

## 8. CARE, EQUIPMENT, AND MAINTENANCE:

• The Comfort Dog shall reside with the primary handler unless otherwise directed by the Chief of Police.

• If temporary alternative housing is required, the Comfort Dog may be boarded at Champion Kennels or placed with a private dog sitter who has executed an approved liability waiver.

• The Department shall cover reasonable costs relating to food, veterinary care, equipment, and required training.

• Veterinary services shall be provided by VCA Abbott Animal Hospital, 21 W. Mountain Street, Worcester, unless otherwise authorized. 24-hour care will be provided at Abbott Animal Hospital or Tufts University, 200 Westboro Rd, North Grafton.

• The handler shall maintain sanitary practices and ensure proper waste disposal at all times.

• While on duty or in public, the Comfort Dog shall wear a collar and leash not exceeding six (6) feet and a department-approved vest or harness identifying it as a Police Comfort Dog.

• Required equipment includes, but is not limited to: crate, bed, training toys, approved leash and vest, and properly equipped transport vehicle.

**9. REPORTING AND DOCUMENTATION:**

• All deployments shall be entered into CAD as a Comfort Dog Engagement (COD).

• Training records shall be maintained by the handler and forwarded to the appropriate department office for official recordkeeping.

• Any injury involving the Comfort Dog or a member of the public shall be reported immediately to a supervisor, documented, and followed by appropriate medical or veterinary evaluation.

**10. REMOVAL, REASSIGNMENT, OR RETIREMENT:**

• Recommendations for removal, reassignment, or retirement of the Comfort Dog may be submitted to the Chief of Police.

• The City of Worcester retains ownership of the Comfort Dog. All decisions regarding retirement, reassignment, or placement shall be determined by the Chief of Police or designee.

**11. VEHICLE USE:**

• A designated department vehicle assigned to the Comfort Dog Team shall be equipped with a canine kennel, K-9 heat alarm system, engine run system, and secure storage for required equipment.

• The assigned vehicle shall be marked and clearly identified as a Worcester Police Department Comfort Dog vehicle, including approved language such as “WPD Comfort Dog.”

• The handler shall maintain vehicle cleanliness, ensure operational readiness, and report mechanical issues immediately.

• The vehicle may be used for training, community events, veterinary care, and approved mutual-aid requests.

- Personal use of the assigned vehicle is prohibited.

Per:

*Paul B. Saucier*
Chief of Police