

**University of Maryland Police  
Police Headquarters  
College Park, Maryland 20742-6011**

**SPECIAL ORDER:** 21-0003

**SUBJECT:** Comfort Dog Guidelines and Procedures

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** December 1, 2021

**ORDERED BY:** David B. Mitchell  
Chief of Police

**I. General Considerations and Guidelines**

The trained Comfort Dog is a valuable supplement to The University of Maryland College Park Police Department resources. The function of the Comfort Dog is to provide interaction during final exams, campus events and to reduce anxiety and increase communication between the 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 tragedy or traumatic events.

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 Departments Community Policing Efforts with our Community Involvement Program.

**II. Purpose**

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

**III. Policy**

When not engaged in training or animal maintenance, the comfort dog handler will be available to aid with community sponsored events and midterms/final exams with a focus on 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.

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 his/her designee.

**IV. Comfort Dog Applications**

A. General Uses for the Comfort Dog Team

1. Aid in the investigation where there is a victim of abuse
  - a) Prior to a forensic interview the Comfort Dog Team may meet with the victim/witness in the lobby or waiting area of the building where the victim 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 victim in conversation, which will help the victim feel more comfortable talking to an unfamiliar person. This interaction will also help the handler assess the victim's developmental capabilities prior to the interview.
  - b) Forensic interview aid of a victim, at the interviewer's discretion. This option is available if the victim becomes extremely upset while away from a place their unfamiliar with. 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 victim.
2. Critical Incident Mental Health Support
  - a) The Comfort Dog Team can help bridge the gap between a traumatic event and the connection to mental health supports. A compassionate presence leveraging the human-canine bond helping 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.
3. Critical Incident Stress Management
  - a) The Comfort Dog Team is authorized to aid UMDPS and the University of Maryland College Park Counseling Center Team with Debriefing or Diffusing First Responders that were involved in a Traumatic Event within the University of Maryland College Park response area as requested.
4. University Support
  - a) The Comfort Dog team may be utilized to assist school officials during time of mental health crisis, bereavement counseling or any other appropriate request.
5. Community Relations
  - a) Requests for appearances at campus events, demonstrations, presentations, or visits will be routed to the Community Involvement unit. 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**

1. Only the Community Resource Supervisor or officers and dogs authorized by the Chief of Police or his/her designee will perform the duties of a Comfort Dog team.
2. No one shall engage with the Comfort Dog unless authorized by the facilitator.
3. 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.
4. No one shall feed anything to the Comfort Dog without the handler's permission.
5. Only the facilitator, or person designated by the facilitator can give the Comfort Dog, a cue or command.
6. 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.

7. Comfort Dog teams may be deployed at times and locations that provide optimal response throughout the campus of the University of Maryland College Park. Requests to deploy the Comfort Dog Team outside the University of Maryland College Park jurisdiction or concurrent jurisdiction should be coordinated through the Community Involvement unit commander.
8. 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 or the immediate aftermath of a critical incident.
  - a. The Comfort Dog team can be used to diffuse a mental health crisis by distracting and refocusing the effected person to a positive interaction.
  - b. 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.
9. The department shall be responsible for reasonable veterinarian treatment for an owner/handler Comfort Dog injured while being used in performance of their duties.
10. For a department owned and issued dogs. The handler will be responsible for the training and upkeep of the dog. UMDPS shall be responsible for all reasonable costs associated with owning a dog, including liability, feeding, upkeep, veterinarian costs, training, kennels, equipment and temporary shelter during the handler vacation periods.

## **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.
- B. The Comfort Dog handler maintains all Comfort Dog-training records. These training records will also be forwarded to the Training Unit for entry into the Comfort Dog handler's training files.
- C. If a Comfort Dog injures any person (child, suspect, citizen, or officer):
  - a. The handler shall ensure that proper medical treatment is received by the person who was injured as soon as possible.
  - b. The handler will notify the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
  - c. The handler and the Comfort Dog handler's supervisor shall examine all injuries.
  - d. All injuries will be photographed (when applicable), regardless of the suspected nature of the injury. Photos will be submitted with the Report and a Command Information Summary will be written.
  - e. 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 his/her 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
  - a. 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.

- b. Use – Arrestees will not be transported with Comfort Dogs in the vehicle.

### **VIII. Training of Comfort Dog**

- 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 his/her 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 his/her 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 Training Coordinator, or designee, 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 Unit.

### **IX. Qualifications and Selection of Comfort Dog Handlers**

- A. The Designated Handler is required to:
  - a. Be full-time, sworn personnel;
  - b. Complete Mental Health First Aid or its equivalent, annually;
  - c. Complete Suicide Prevention training; and
  - d. Complete Crisis Intervention Training.

### **X. Uniform and Equipment**

- A. The Comfort Dog Handler shall wear:
  - a. The authorized seasonally appropriate uniform and equipment of that of a patrol officer; or
  - b. A subdued uniform of which consists of tan or dark pants, and department approved collared shirt that displays an embroidered or printed badge and the officers name, handcuffs and firearm; or
  - c. Plain clothes as appropriate.
- B. Anytime the general public has access to the Comfort Dog it shall be equipped and wear:
  - a. An appropriate collar and leash, no longer than 6 feet.
  - b. A vest or harness marked "POLICE".
  - c. The vest or harness may be adorned with other appropriate patches, badges or memento's in relation to its service.
  - d. 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 for cases of emergency.

### **XI. Disposition of Comfort Dogs**

- A. University of Maryland College Park Owned Dog

- a. Retirement of the Comfort Dog
  - i. Recommendations to retire a Comfort Dog for cause will be made through the chain of command. After consultation with the departmental 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 use.
- b. Employee Leave
  - i. Teams Greater than Five Years partnership
    - 1. In cases where a handler that has been teamed with a Comfort Dog for greater than five year leaves the department through resignation, injury, or retirement, 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.
  - ii. Teams with less than five years partnership
    - 1. In cases where a handler leaves the department through resignation, injury, or retirement, prior to five years of teamwork, 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.
  - iii. Dissolution of the Program
    - 1. In cases where UMDPS or the department discontinues the program the Comfort Dog shall be made available for adoption at no cost to the handler, if so desired. If the handler declines adoption, the dog may be offered up for adoption to another as determined by the Chief of Police or his/her designee.