

**WILLISTON POLICE
DEPARTMENT**

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Comfort Dog Program 2.0

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I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

The trained Comfort Dog is a valuable supplement to the Williston 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.

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.

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

The comfort dog handler will be available to aid with criminal investigations with a focus on helping individuals reduce anxiety and help foster better communication. The comfort dog team will also work to education the public 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. Titles and definitions of comfort dog teams:

1. Crisis Response Dog –Dogs specifically trained to respond to individuals at the scene of a crisis incident and support field work of patrol officers and surrounding agencies.
2. Support Service Dog – Dogs specifically trained to support the mental health of employees within the police department and are not deployed with the public.

B. General Uses for the Crisis Response Dog Team:

1. Victim/Witness Support:

(a) Aid in the investigation where there is a child victim of abuse:

- (i) Prior to a forensic interview the Crisis Response 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 Crisis Response Dog Handler will also have the opportunity to engage the child in conversation, which will 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.
- (ii) Forensic interview aid of a child victim, at the interviewer's discretion. This option is available if the child is upset or uncomfortable while away from their parent(s). If the Crisis Response Dog is used in the interview, the handler is to perform the duties of handling the Crisis Response Dog and allow the interviewer to engage in communication with the child. At the discretion of the interviewer, they may request the handler's help during the interview to build rapport with the child or to assist in interview questioning. At the discretion of the handler and interviewer the Crisis Response Dog, may be requested to remain in the interview without the Crisis Response Dog Handler being present. In order for the Crisis Response Dog to remain without the handler, the Crisis Response Dog MUST be trained and equipped with a remote training collar (e-collar) and the handler must be able to observe the Crisis Response Dog while apart.

(b) Aid in investigation with an adult victim/witness:

- (i) Prior to an interview the adult the Crisis Response Dog Team may meet with the victim/witness in the lobby or waiting area of the building where they will be interviewed to reduce anxiety while the interviewer prepares for the interview.
- (ii) At the interviewer's discretion the Crisis Response Dog Team will accompany the victim/witness throughout the interview process. If the Crisis Response Dog is used in the interview, the handler is to perform the duties of handling the Crisis Response Dog and allow the interviewer to engage in communication with the victim/witness. At the discretion of the interviewer, they may request the handler's help during the interview to build rapport with the victim/witness or to assist in interview questioning. At the discretion of the handler and interviewer the Crisis Response Dog, may be requested to remain in the interview without the Crisis Response Dog Handler being present. In order for the Crisis Response Dog to remain without the handler, the Crisis Response Dog MUST be trained and equipped with a remote training collar (e-collar) and the handler must be able to observe the Crisis Response Dog while apart.

2. Trial testimony of a victim/witness:

- (a) Like the procedures for forensic interviews and prosecutor deployments, the Crisis Response Dog team may be used in the waiting area prior to testimony. If the presiding judge allows the Crisis Response Dog team to be deployed in the court room, the Crisis Response Dog handler will not engage in communicating with the victim/witness and only performs the necessary handler duties. While in the court room the Crisis Response Dog handler will follow all the rules for use of the Crisis Response Dog set forth by the presiding judge as long as they fall within the scope of this policy

3. Critical Incident Mental Health Support:

- (a) The Crisis Response 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.

4. Critical Incident Stress Management:

- (a) The Crisis Response Dog Team is authorized to assist other jurisdictions with Critical Incident Stress Management as needed. All requests will be approved by the Chief of Police or Lieutenant. The On-Duty Supervisor may authorize deployment of the Crisis Response Dog Team in the event of an ongoing or time sensitive incident.

5. School Support:

- (a) The Crisis Response 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.
- (b) Crisis Response Dog team may visit schools within the Town of Williston during times when no crisis or intervention is needed in order to build rapport with students and staff and provide on going mental health support through routine interactions with the Crisis Response Dog Team.

6. Community Relations:

- (a) Requests for demonstrations or visits will be routed to the Handler. The Handler will be responsible for scheduling and receiving approval for the visit with their direct supervisor.

C. General Uses for the Support Service Dog:

1. Employee Support:

- (a) Support Service Dog team will be utilized by staff of the Williston Police Department while at the department. The Support Service Dog will interact with staff members and provide stress relief and mental health support to on-duty officers and staff.

V. AUTHORIZATION, LIMITATIONS, DEPLOYMENT AND USE

Crisis Response Dog Team:

1. Only officers and dog authorized by the Chief of Police or his/her designee will perform the duties of a Crisis Response Dog team.
2. No one shall feed anything to the Crisis Response Dog without the handler's permission.

3. Only the handler, or person designated by the Handler can give the Crisis Response dog a cue or command.
4. The Crisis Response 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 Crisis Response 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.
 - a. The Crisis Response Dog may be cross trained to perform other tasks to assist the police department. These tasks should be kept to non-criminal interventions and focused on life saving opportunities. Example: Human scent tracking for missing individuals or human scent article recovery.
5. The Crisis Response Dog team may be deployed at times and locations that provide optimal response throughout the Town of Williston. Requests to deploy the Crisis Response Team outside the city jurisdiction should be coordinated through the Lieutenant, and if not available the On-Duty Supervisor.
6. In order for the Crisis Response 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. In situations where a child is located at an active crime scene, 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 there is evidence supporting the need for an immediate removal of the child, the Crisis Response Dog team would be responsible for creating a positive distraction in order to remove the child without further traumatizing or increasing anxiety.
 - b. The Crisis Response Dog team can be used to diffuse a mental health crisis by distracting and refocusing the effected person to a positive interaction.
 - c. In situations of an active critical incident or immediate aftermath thereof, the Crisis Response Dog team would be responsible for creating a positive distraction as well comforting survivors prior to mental health service involvement.

Support Service Dog Team

1. Only employees and dog authorized by the Chief of Police or his/her designee will perform the duties of a Support Service Dog team.
2. No one shall feed anything to the Support Service Dog without the handler's permission.
3. Only the handler, or person designated by the Handler can give the Support Service dog a cue or command.
4. Support Service Dog Team will not be asked to leave the building to perform official duties.
5. The Support Service Dog is not expected or required to interact with the general public.
6. The Support Service Dog can interact with staff members and provide stress relief and mental health support to on-duty officers and staff.

VI. COMFORT DOG REPORTING PROCEDURES

- A. Use of the Crisis Response Dog will be explained by the handler in writing via the agency's Record Management System (RMS).
- B. The Support Dog Team will keep records of the number of days where the Support Dog was at the Williston Police Department and interacted with Department members.
- C. The Comfort Dog handlers will maintain copies of all Comfort Dog-training records. Upon request these training records will be provided to the Office of the Chief of Police.
- D. 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

- 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. Crisis Response Dog handlers will use department issued vehicles for transporting the Crisis Response Dog while on shift. Handlers may carry refreshments for the Crisis Response Dog in the vehicle. The Crisis Response Dog shall not be left unaccompanied in a vehicle that is not equipped with a heat sensor.
- B. Support Service Dog will remain within the police department while on duty.
- C. Arrestees should not be transported with Comfort Dogs in the vehicle. However, if an Arrestee is transported in a vehicle with a comfort dog, the arrestee must consent to be transported in the vehicle with the dog and there must complete separation by a partition between the dog and arrestee. If the arrestee does not consent to be transported with a dog, alternative transportation must be arranged.

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 nationally 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.
 - a. Suggested certifications for Crisis Response Dog:
 - i. Therapy Dog
 - ii. American Kennel Club (AKC) Canine Good Citizen (CGC)
 - iii. AKC Urban CGC
 - iv. National Association of First Responders Support K9s (NAFRS)
 - b. Suggested certification for Support Service Dog:
 - i. AKC CGC
 - ii. AKC Urban CGC

- 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. (Examples: Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Boonefield Labradors, Therapy dogs of Vermont).
- C. The Lieutenant, or designee, will ensure that the above training is conducted as indicated and will ensure that the training records are maintained for the Comfort Dog team.

IX. QUALIFICATIONS AND SELECTION OF COMFORT DOG HANDLERS

- A. Crisis Response Dog Handler:
 - a. Members must have a minimum of one full year of Williston Police Department Service following the fulltime police academy and be off probation status.
 - b. The Crisis Response Dog candidate's residence must be capable of housing the Crisis Response Dog and the member will be required to keep the Crisis Response 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 Crisis Response Dog. In addition, there will be an interview of the Crisis Response Dog candidates' family (if applicable).
 - c. The Crisis Response Dog Handler Candidate shall have the following minimum training:
 - i. Full Time Police Academy
 - ii. Strong interview skills
 - iii. Understanding of emotional stress
 - iv. Ability to comfort victims/witnesses of crimes
 - v. Ability to communicate well with people suffering mental health crisis's and suffering from victimization.
 - vi. Good public speaking skills
 - vii. Ability to teach/instruct a group
- B. Support Service Dog Handler:
 - a. Members must have a minimum of one full year of Williston Police Department Service and be off probation status. Members may be sworn officers or civilian employees.

- b. The Support Service Dog candidate's residence must be capable of housing the Support Service Dog and the member will be required to keep the Support Service 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 Support Service Dog. In addition, there will be an interview of the Support Service Dog candidates' family (if applicable).
- c. Support Service Dog Handler must have a job assignment whose duties primarily remain within the building of the Williston Police Department.
- d. Support Service Dog Handler Candidate shall have the following skills:
 - i. Understanding of emotional stress
 - ii. Ability to comfort and provide peer support
 - iii. Ability to communicate well with people suffering mental health or high stress.
 - iv. Good public speaking skills
 - v. Ability to be comfortable in large groups as well as one on one interactions
 - vi. Ability to teach/instruct a group

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. 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, collar or harness marked "POLICE"
 - i. The vest, collar or harness may be adorned with other appropriate patches, badges, or mementos in relation to its service

XI. COSTS AND DISPOSITION OF COMFORT DOGS

A. Town Owned Dog.

a. Costs and upkeep:

- i. The handler will be responsible for the training, and day to day care of the dog.
- ii. The Town 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.

b. 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 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.

c. Employee Leave

- i. In cases where a handler that has been teamed with a Comfort Dog leaves the department through resignation (good standing), 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.

d. Dissolution of the Program

- i. In cases where the city of 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.

B. Employee-Owned Dog

a. Costs and upkeep

- i. The handler will be responsible for the training, and day to day care of the dog.

- ii. The handler shall be responsible for all reasonable costs associated with owning a dog, feeding, upkeep, veterinarian costs, training, kennels, and temporary shelter during the handler vacation periods.
 - iii. The handler shall be responsible for all liability costs when NOT performing tasks related to their role.
 - iv. The town shall be responsible for all reasonable costs associated with liability costs when performing tasks related to their role.
 - v. The town shall be responsible for all reasonable costs associated with equipment directly related to the dog's function while at work.
- b. 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 handler the Chief of Police will make the recommendation as to whether or not the Comfort Dog. The Chief of Police may request consultation with a veterinarian and/or an approved trainer to aid in the decision.
- c. Employee Leave
- i. In cases where a handler leaves employment with the Williston Police Department their Comfort Dog's role within the department will also end.