

# WINTER HAVEN POLICE DEPARTMENT

## GENERAL ORDER 42.6

### Therapy Dog Program

**ACCREDITATION STANDARDS: CALEA 41.1.5- CFA 14.11**

**EFFECTIVE DATE: September 20, 2018**

**RESCINDS: G.O. 42.6 December 8, 2020 and all applicable Amended/Temporary Orders prior to August 7, 2025**

**LAST REVISED DATE: August 7, 2025**

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### **POLICY**

It shall be the policy of the Winter Haven Police Department to deploy a therapy Dog program for the purpose of reducing the anxiety of juvenile and adult victims/witnesses and for public relations.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this General Order is to establish guidelines for the implementation, organization, operational procedures, and responsibilities for a Therapy Dog Team.

### **SCOPE**

This General Order shall apply to all members.

### **Procedure**

#### **I. Administration**

- A. The trained therapy dog is a valuable supplement to Winter Haven Police Department resources. The function of the therapy dog is to provide interaction during investigations

involving children and adult victims and witnesses to reduce anxiety and increase communication between the child and/or adult victim/witness and investigators.

- B. When not engaged in training or animal maintenance, the therapy dog handler will conduct criminal investigations consistent with their current assignment within the Investigative Services Bureau and public education about the therapy program and utilizing the therapy dog to help victims feel more at ease while speaking about their situation.
- C. The therapy dog will be assigned to the Investigative Services Bureau and handled by a detective. Administrative supervision of the therapy dog handler, for purposes of selection, training and maintenance of the therapy dog, re-assignment and equipment, will be provided by a supervisor as designated by the Investigative Services Bureau Commander.

## **II. General uses for the Therapy Dog Team**

- A. Initial investigations where there is an adult and/or child victim of abuse.
- B. Forensic interview of a child victim at the interviewer's discretion. This option is available if the child becomes extremely upset while away from their parent(s). If the therapy dog is used in the interview, the handler is to only perform the duties of handling the therapy dog and allow the interviewer to engage in communication with the child.
- C. Attorney interview/deposition of a child victim/witness, at the attorney's discretion. Engaging the child in the lobby or waiting area of the prosecutor's office allows the child to reduce their anxiety as they prepare to tell the details of a traumatic event. The child may also remember the therapy dog team from the prior processes, which increases the probability that the child will be able to recall the articulated statements of events with consistency. The therapy dog team can then introduce the interviewing attorney to the child and transfer the bond and trust. Like the procedures for forensic interviews, the therapy dog handler does not engage in communication with the child and only performs the necessary handler duties.
- D. Trial testimony of a child victim/witness is accordance with Florida State Statute. Like the procedures for forensic interviews and prosecutor deployments, the therapy dog team may be used in the waiting area prior to testimony. If the preceding judge allows the therapy dog team to be deployed, the therapy dog handler will not engage in communicating with the child and only performs the necessary handler duties.
- E. Community Relations Demonstrations. Requests for demonstrations will be routed to the therapy dog handler's supervisors. All requests will be made far enough in advance to ensure that a therapy dog will be available. If there is a need for a short notice demonstration, approval via phone by either the therapy dog handler's supervisor or the Investigative Services Bureau Commander will suffice.
- F. Therapy dog teams shall be deployed at times and locations that provide optimal response throughout the City of Winter Haven. Requests to deploy the therapy dog team outside of the city's jurisdiction shall be coordinated through the therapy dog handler's supervisor.
- G. In order for the therapy dog team to be most effective, their use is designed for cases in which there are reasons to believe the allegations of abuse/neglect are present or as

directed by supervision. In situations where the 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 therapy dog team would be responsible for creating a positive distraction in order to remove the child without further traumatizing or increasing anxiety.

- H. Prior to a forensic interview the therapy dog team may meet with the child victim/witness the purpose of reducing anxiety while the Child Protection Team and/or detective prepares for their interview. The therapy dog handlers will also have the opportunity to engage the child in conversation, which will help the child victim/witness 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.

### **III. Therapy Dog Reporting Procedures**

- A. Use of the therapy dog will be explained by the handler in writing via the Department's Record Management System (RMS) and any other documentation requirements. All completed reports will be forwarded to the therapy dog handler's supervisor.
- B. The therapy dog handler will maintain all therapy dog training records. These training records will also be forwarded to the Training Unit for entry into the therapy dog handler's training files.
- C. If a therapy dog bites a person (child, suspect, citizen or department member):
  - 1. The handler shall ensure proper medical treatment is received by the person who was bitten immediately.
  - 2. The therapy dog handler will notify their supervisor or in their absence, the on-duty supervisor immediately as well as the command staff officer on-call.
  - 3. The therapy dog handler will document all injuries via digital photographs and complete a case report. Photos will be submitted to the therapy dog handler's supervisor and a Report of Injury Report shall be completed by the supervisor. All documents and photographs will be submitted to the Investigative Services Bureau Commander for review and corrective action taken by the supervisor/commander if deemed necessary.

### **IV. Therapy Dog Vehicles**

- A. Therapy dog handlers shall use their assigned units for transporting the therapy dog. Handlers may carry refreshments for the therapy dog in the vehicle. Handlers will report any maintenance deficiencies immediately to the therapy dog handler's supervisor. Due to the fact there is no heat sensor/alarm provided in the vehicle, at no time shall the therapy dog be in the vehicle unaccompanied. While in the field the therapy dog will accompany the handler at all times.
- B. Window tinting. The rear deck and rear door windows are tinted 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.

## **V. Training of Therapy Dog Teams**

- A. Therapy Dog teams will receive initial certification and/or re-training in accordance with a nationally registered and recognized therapy dog organization or any certifying association approved by the Chief of Police or designee.
- B. Therapy dog teams will train on a regular basis to maintain proficiency and operational readiness. Additionally, therapy dog teams will undergo a demonstration of proficiency on a yearly basis under the supervision of a nationally registered/recognized therapy dog organization.
- C. The Investigative Services Bureau Commander or designee shall ensure the above training is conducted as indicated and will ensure that the training records are maintained for each therapy dog team by the Training Unit.

## **VI. Qualifications and Selection of Therapy Dog and Handlers**

- A. In cases in which there is an opening as a therapy dog handler position, the Services Bureau Commander or designee shall announce the opening.
- B. Members must be off probation and currently assigned as a detective in the Investigative Services Bureau.
- C. The therapy dog handler candidate's residence must be capable of housing a therapy dog and/or have adequate space for the construction of a kennel, since the member will be required to keep the therapy 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 therapy dog.
- D. Selection of Therapy Dog: The Canine Unit supervisor or designee shall screen and test therapy dog(s) for selection. The recommendation to purchase or the donation of a therapy dog shall be forwarded to the Investigative Services Bureau Commander. Therapy dogs selected for use shall: (CALEA 41.1.5 b)
  - 1. Demonstrate trainability for obedience and therapy;
  - 2. Shall not be aggressive;
  - 3. Be social;
  - 4. Be in excellent health and condition;
  - 5. Pass a veterinarian check, including tests for internal parasites, blood tests for heartworms and X-rays for hip and elbow dysplasia; and
  - 6. Have a guarantee of health (at a minimum until checked by the COWH vet) and trainability; and
  - 7. Complete approved training/certification for therapy dogs before being placed in service.

## **VII. Health Care, Sanitation and Injuries**

- A. Therapy Dog and their dog houses, kennels, runs and feeding equipment shall be kept clean at all times. The following items shall also be maintained daily:
  - 1. Therapy dog waste and uneaten food shall be removed.

2. Therapy dogs shall have fresh water in a suitable container.
  3. Department vehicles used to transport the therapy dog shall be cleaned.
- B. Therapy Dog handlers shall ensure:
1. Each therapy dog shall be given an annual physical to include required immunizations and a heartworm check.
  2. All therapy dogs shall be given heartworm preventive medication.
  3. Only pre-approved veterinary facilities shall be utilized.
  4. The therapy dog handler is responsible for the therapy dog receiving medical care when needed. The agency approved veterinarian shall dispense medication when appropriate.
  5. The therapy dog handler shall also groom and bathe the canine when necessary, presenting a neat appearance at all times.
  6. Therapy dogs shall be boarded at kennels authorized by the Chief of Police.
  7. Showing off with the therapy dog shall not be permitted at any time. Therapy dog demonstrations shall be pre-approved by the Investigative Services Bureau Commander or designee.
  8. Punishing therapy dogs by striking or kicking is strictly prohibited.
  9. In the event that a therapy dog escapes their kennel or the canine unit, the handler shall notify the on duty supervisor immediately. The on-duty supervisor shall respond to the scene and coordinate the search and recovery of the therapy dog.
  10. While at the handler's residence, the therapy dog shall be kenneled when visitors are present.

### **VIII. Disposition of Therapy Dogs**

- A. Recommendations to retire a therapy dog for cause will be made through the chain of command. The Chief of Police will make the determination as to whether or not the therapy dog may be retired to the care of the handler or stay in service. This shall be done in accordance with the City of Winter Haven policy.
- B. In cases where a handler leaves the Investigative Services Bureau, the therapy dog will remain the property of the Department. If the therapy dog is determined to be suitable for reassignment to a new handler, it shall be retained within the unit. If the therapy dog is determined to be unsuitable for reassignment, the therapy dog will be retired as specified in this General Order.



**APPROVED**

Vance Monroe Jr.  
CHIEF OF POLICE