

POLICY TITLE: PEER SUPPORT THERAPY DOG PROGRAM		PAGE 1 OF 9
POLICY NUMBER: 4.7.2		
CHAPTER 4: TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT		
	STATE of MAINE DEPARTMENT of CORRECTIONS Approved by Commissioner: 	PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS: See Section VIII
EFFECTIVE DATE: July 24, 2023	LATEST REVISION:	CHECK ONLY IF APA []

I. AUTHORITY

The Commissioner of Corrections adopts this policy pursuant to the authority contained in 34-A M.R.S.A. Section 1403.

II. APPLICABILITY

Entire Maine Department of Corrections

III. POLICY

The Department recognizes the importance for staff to have support for stressful personal, professional, and work situations that impact the work environment. It is the policy of the Department of Corrections to include therapy dogs in the Peer Support Program to assist staff in managing stress. Well-trained therapy dogs are valuable members of the Department’s Peer Support Program. The function of the therapy dogs is to provide interactions to reduce stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and to increase holistic wellness to Department staff.

IV. DEFINITIONS

1. Therapy dog – often referred to as a “comfort” dog that is trained specifically to provide comfort and love to community groups like hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and other settings. A therapy dog does NOT support a specific person. Therapy dogs do not have rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or the Maine Human Rights Act (MHRA) and there must be prior authorization for their use.
2. Photograph - for the purposes of this policy, the word “photograph” includes any kind of still or moving image with or without sound and whether stored/transmitted electronically or as hard copy.

V. CONTENTS

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VI. ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A: [Peer Support Therapy Dog Contact Form](#)
- Attachment B: [Report of Injury to Dog](#)
- Attachment C: [Report of Injury by a Dog](#)

VII. PROCEDURES

Procedure A: Peer Support Therapy Dog Program, General

1. This policy is an addendum to Department Policies 4.7, Peer Support Program for Facilities and 4.7.1, Peer Support Program for Community Corrections and Central Office for using therapy dogs as a resource for the Peer Support Program.
2. The Commissioner, or designee, shall determine the facilities and regional community corrections offices authorized, and whether Central Office is authorized, to have therapy dogs on-site as a resource for the Peer Support Program.
3. If approved by the Commissioner, or designee, a facility Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Community Corrections, or their designees, as applicable, may:
 - a. establish a site-specific therapy dog team (staff handler and dog) in the facility or in a regional community corrections office, as applicable; and
 - b. collaborate with another facility or regional community corrections office to allow a therapy dog team assigned to one site to be brought to another site on an occasional basis.
4. At each facility or regional community corrections office that has a therapy dog team, the Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Community Corrections, or their designees, as applicable, shall select an employee as a Peer Support therapy dog handler and another employee as a backup handler.
5. The notification, filling, and compensation for the handler position shall be in accordance with applicable contract bargaining agreements, Maine Civil Service Rules, and federal and state law.
6. Once a trained therapy dog is accepted for use in the Peer Support Therapy Dog Program, the dog becomes the property of the Department and the Department shall be responsible for all food, care, and veterinary service costs.

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7. The facility Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Community Corrections, or their designees, as applicable, upon consultation with the handler and veterinarian, shall decide when the Peer Support therapy dog will retire from service. If the handler is in good standing without pending disciplinary action, the handler shall be afforded the opportunity to purchase the dog from the Department for \$1.00 and shall be responsible for the dog's welfare and maintenance including safety, feeding, grooming, cleaning, vaccination, and veterinary services after purchase.
8. A Peer Support therapy dog shall never be used as a type of force upon an individual or another animal.
9. Policy 1.23, Contact with News Media, shall be followed in relation to any photograph or video showing a facility resident or community corrections client or any information identifying a resident or client being published or broadcast in any printed materials, on television or radio, or on digital media including, but not limited to, websites, social media feeds, YouTube, or similar channels, or in the press.
10. If any staff becomes aware that a therapy dog has been mistreated (abused, neglected, or harassed) by a handler or other staff, they shall make a written report to the appropriate supervisor, who shall notify the Office of Professional Review in accordance with applicable Department policies. If the report is substantiated, the facility Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Community Corrections, or their designees, as applicable, shall ensure it is reported to the appropriate law enforcement agency or animal control officer.

Procedure B: Training and Certification

1. Handlers and their dog are certified as a team.
2. All Peer Support handlers and therapy dogs shall be trained and certified by an approved therapy dog training organization, which has as a purpose granting dog and handler training and certification.
3. The Chief Administrative Officer or Regional Correctional Administrator, or their designees, as applicable, shall ensure that records relating to each handler's and dog's training and certification are maintained in appropriate training or personnel files.

Procedure C: Handler Selection and Responsibilities

1. A therapy dog handler shall:
 - a. have a minimum of two years of work experience in corrections;
 - b. have no disciplinary action within the past year;
 - c. have a flexible work schedule;
 - d. be trained in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) or be willing to become trained in CISM;

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- e. be an active member of a Peer Support Team or be willing to become a member of a Peer Support Team;
 - f. sign releases of information required by the therapy dog training organization pertaining to veterinary records for personal family pets;
 - g. allow family pets to be assessed by the therapy dog training organization staff prior to the Peer Support therapy dog being placed in their home; and
 - h. satisfactorily meet all training and certification requirements of the therapy dog training organization.
2. In addition, the handler is responsible for, but not limited to, the following:
- a. have the peer support therapy dog reside at the handler's home;
 - b. provide daily care of the therapy dog;
 - c. provide the therapy dog with flea, tick, and heartworm protection and medical care as determined by a veterinarian;
 - d. ensure the therapy dog is up to date with vaccinations provided by a veterinarian;
 - e. if there are family pets in the home, maintain current vaccinations, flea, tick, and heartworm protection, and veterinary care for all pets;
 - f. retain copies of health care records, including vaccinations, of the therapy dog and all other pets in the home;
 - g. ensure the therapy dog is up to date with its municipal dog registration;
 - h. assess the scene/location and only take the dog once it is deemed safe prior to taking the dog out into the community on calls or community events; and
 - i. ensure only trained and certified handlers handle the dog on deployments. In exigent circumstances, a member of the public may be asked by the handler to handle the dog.

Procedure D: Removal of a Handler

1. A handler may be removed from their position as a handler for any of the following:
 - a. any condition which might prevent or limit the handler's performance as a member of the canine unit;
 - b. mishandling, misuse, or neglect, abuse, or other mistreatments of a canine;
 - c. unprofessional conduct; or
 - d. any other reason the Commissioner, or designee, determines to be in the best interests of the Department.
2. Removal of a handler from their position shall be in accordance with contract bargaining agreements and Maine Civil Service Rules.

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Procedure E: Equipment

1. The Department shall provide the following equipment for the care and use of the Peer Support therapy dog:
 - a. collar and leash;
 - b. appropriately sized kennel to secure the dog indoors;
 - c. food and water bowls;
 - d. toys;
 - e. dog bed; and
 - f. dog seat belt tether or crash kennel for vehicle transports.
2. The Department may issue a vest, which may be adorned with appropriate patches, badges, or approved mementos about the dog’s service.

Procedure F: Peer Support Therapy Dog Use

1. If the Commissioner has authorized a facility, regional community corrections office, or Central Office to have a peer support therapy dog team, the handler and therapy dog shall have access to all areas of that site, unless access might interfere with operations and is not allowed by the facility Chief Administrative Officer, Regional Correctional Administrator, or Central Office supervisor, or their designees, as applicable.
2. Upon completion of training and certification, the peer support therapy dog shall be brought to work by the handler on every scheduled workday. The handler shall make a reasonable effort to equitably distribute their time at their assigned site and/or at any site to which they are allowed to bring their dog on an occasional basis pursuant to Procedure A.3.
3. Other than brief interactions, the handler shall document use of the peer support therapy dog by completing a Peer Support Therapy Dog Contact Form, Attachment A.
4. A Peer Support therapy dog shall:
 - a. be leashed when on duty outside of a secure office area;
 - b. wear a collar and a vest (if issued);
 - c. be leashed while in public, except in a dog park or other public area where dogs are generally allowed to be unleashed.
5. The handlers shall bring their Peer Support therapy dog to all trainings, staff meetings and other duties required for their handler. If the training or meeting is in a location that is not a Department location, the handler shall obtain approval from a person in charge of the location before bringing the Peer Support therapy dog to the location.
6. A handler shall not bring the Peer Support therapy dog into the vicinity of a person if the handler becomes aware that the person has a dog allergy, is uncomfortable around dogs, or does not wish to interact with the Peer Support therapy dog.

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7. The Peer Support therapy dog shall be available to attend and participate in Critical Incident Stress Management sessions at that facility or office upon request, unless there is a participant who objects or is known to be allergic or uncomfortable around dogs. In that instance, the Peer Support therapy dog may be made available in another location for any participants who choose to interact with the Peer Support therapy dog.
8. A handler who is a probation officer or juvenile community corrections officer shall not bring their peer support therapy dog on house checks.
9. If a Peer Support therapy dog and the handler are in a public setting, the handler shall only permit interactions with members of the public by mutual agreement.
10. A Peer Support therapy dog shall also be available by request of a Chief Administrative Officer or Regional Correctional Administrator, or their designees, as applicable, for use as a therapy dog with residents, clients, and/or victims, as applicable.
11. A Peer Support therapy dog shall also be available to Central Office staff upon request, if schedules and time permit.
12. If an afterhours call for deployment is made, the handler/backup handler shall make a reasonable effort to respond. If they respond, the handler shall be compensated in accordance with applicable contract bargaining agreements, Maine Civil Service Rules, and state and federal law.
13. A therapy dog must be provided ten (10) minute breaks immediately after every fifty (50) minutes of work. Breaks may include things like a walk outside, a bathroom break outside, or rest in a quiet space.
14. Each handler shall maintain:
 - a. a schedule for their Peer Support therapy dogs; and
 - b. all dog training records.
15. Requests for use of a therapy dog at a Department facility or office outside their assigned site, other than a site to which they have been approved to be brought on an occasional basis pursuant to Procedure A.3, shall be submitted for review and approval by the facility Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable.
16. Requests for use of the therapy dog outside the Department shall be submitted for review and approval by the facility Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable.
17. A Peer Support therapy dog shall attend events as requested by the Commissioner, or designee (e.g., job fairs or recruitment events, school events, graduations, funerals, public service announcements, networking events with community partners, recovery events, assisting community agencies etc.).
18. In the event of an incident necessitating a response from the handler in a capacity other than as a handler (such as in an ICS, use of force response incident, or at the direction

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of command staff, etc.) and a Peer Support therapy dog is present, the handler shall secure the dog in a safe location (e.g., in a room with a closed door, vehicle, dog crate, if available, etc.) and respond in accordance with the appropriate Department policies.

Procedure G: Transportation

1. The Department, after consultation with Central Fleet Management, shall assign a handler a vehicle appropriate for transportation and use by the handler and Peer Support therapy dog while on duty.
2. Except in special circumstances, facility residents and/or community corrections clients shall not be transported in the same vehicle as a therapy dog. If special circumstances arise where the presence of a therapy dog is requested during a transport, the handler may request permission from the appropriate facility Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Community Corrections, or their designees, as applicable.
3. For vehicle transports, a dog shall be transported in the back seat of the vehicle either:
 - a. in a crate that has been anchored to the vehicle using a seat belt; or
 - b. with a seat belt tether and an attached crash harness.

The dog shall not be allowed to stick its head out of the window of the vehicle.
4. In exigent circumstances, the dog may be transported by another member of the Department in an assigned vehicle.
5. When the Peer Support therapy dog is not on duty, it may be transported in the handler’s personal vehicle.
6. The dog shall not be left unattended in a vehicle unless there is climate control in use.

Procedure H: Routine and Emergency Veterinarian Care

1. At each facility or regional community corrections office with a therapy dog, the Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable, shall ensure that practices are implemented for veterinary services appropriate for the care and treatment of the therapy dog.
2. Each handler shall ensure that the dog assigned to their care receives:
 - a. all vaccinations, routine physical examinations, and any special grooming that is required in accordance with the schedule recommended by a veterinarian; and
 - b. flea, tick, and heartworm protection.

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3. The handler shall ensure that the dog is examined:
 - a. on a regular basis for injuries, symptoms of health problems, and other health care needs and shall promptly report these matters to a veterinarian; and
 - b. for injuries after every incident in which the dog might have been injured.
4. If the dog sustains an injury, the handler shall ensure the following occurs:
 - a. referral to a veterinarian as soon as possible for treatment;
 - b. examination of all injuries;
 - c. photograph of any injury;
 - d. taking of any witness statements; and
 - e. completion of a Report of Injury to a Dog (Attachment B) and submission of the report, along with any photos and witness statements, to the Chief Administrative Officer or Regional Correctional Administrator, or their designees, as applicable.
5. A therapy dog shall not be given any medication unless prescribed by a veterinarian.
6. Documentation of all care and treatment rendered to a therapy dog shall be maintained in a secure location with its other records.

Procedure I: Injury to a Person by a Therapy Dog

1. Any staff who becomes aware of any injury, including a bite, by a therapy dog shall notify, as soon as possible, the handler, who shall then notify the Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable, as soon as possible.
2. The handler shall immediately place the dog in a crate or, or if unable to do so, other staff shall place the dog in a crate.
3. The handler shall follow-up to ensure that:
 - a. a completed Report of Injury by a Dog (Attachment C) is submitted to the Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable, before the end of the shift along with any witness statements and photographs;
 - b. if a dog bite, there is completed a Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry [Animal Bite Report](#), which is submitted to the local municipality; and
 - c. there is follow-up with the dog's veterinarian for any necessary medical records.
4. The Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable, shall verbally notify the Commissioner, or designee, of any dog bite.
5. Any facility resident bitten by a therapy dog shall be referred to the facility medical staff for immediate medical attention. A refusal to be assessed by medical staff shall be supported by a written and signed statement to that effect.

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6. The Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable, shall review the injury incident and determine if the dog is still appropriate for the Peer Support Therapy Dog Program.

Procedure J: Injury to Another Animal by a Therapy Dog

1. Any staff who becomes aware of any injury by a dog to another animal, including a bite, shall notify, as soon as possible, the handler, who shall then notify the Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable, as soon as possible.
2. The handler shall ensure the dog is immediately placed in a crate.
3. The handler shall follow-up to ensure that:
 - a. a completed Report of Injury by a Dog (Attachment B) is submitted to the Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable, before the end of the shift along with any witness statements and photographs;
 - b. if a dog bite, there is completed a Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry [Animal Bite Report](#), which is submitted to the local municipality; and
 - c. there is follow-up with the dog’s veterinarian for any necessary medical records.
4. If any animal is injured by a dog, the owner shall be referred to a local veterinarian for any veterinary care.
5. The Chief Administrative Officer, Director of Adult Community Corrections, or the Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, or their designees, as applicable, shall review the injury incident and evaluate the dog to determine if the dog is still appropriate for the Peer Support Therapy Dog Program.

VIII. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

None

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