



CITY OF MURRIETA

March 22, 2023

The Honorable Chris Holden
Chair, Assembly Committee on Appropriations Holden
Capitol Office, 1021 O Street, Suite 5650
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Letter of Opposition for AB 742 (Jackson)

Dear Assemblymember Holden:

The City of Murrieta and the Murrieta Police Department are strongly opposed to Assembly Bill 742, which would prohibit the Murrieta Police Department from using apprehension canines (K9s) to search for and arrest felony suspects.

We reject Mr. Jackson's statements associating our current use of K9s to systemic racism. Our Police Officers are not racially prejudiced members of our community, as Mr. Jackson alluded to at his press conference. Moreover, his misuse of K9 data is disturbing and inaccurate. Our statistics, including the DOJ data he cites, debunk these misleading assertions outright.

We do agree that at certain times in our nation's history, K9s were used inappropriately and the images of K9s being used in the 1960s are quite disturbing. However, when we look at how the training for our profession has evolved, and after proper academic analysis of current data, it is clear that any comparison between then and now is not valid.

The Murrieta Police Department prides itself on using K9s only when necessary to protect the safety of the public and our officers. In fact, our policy only permits the use of K9s to apprehend adults suspected of serious felonies, and after providing several verbal announcements/warnings (if reasonably safe to do so). Our policy goes one step further and recommends our K9 officers announce their intent to use a K9 in other languages if time permits. Further, our policy also strictly prohibits the use of K9s to apprehend known juvenile suspects.

The following Murrieta Police Department force analysis data proves that K9s are an extremely effective and statistically proven de-escalation tool. In 2021, 153 K9 deployments / apprehensions out of 157 resolved themselves without escalating to using a K9 to apprehend via an actual bite. In fact, only 4 K9 apprehensions in 2021 resulted in a bite. Similarly, in 2022, 115 K9 deployments / apprehensions out of 115 resolved themselves without escalating to using a K9 to apprehend via an actual bite. In 2022, Murrieta PD had 0 K9 bites. To put an even finer point on this data, only 1.4% of our K9 deployments / apprehensions over the last 2 years resulted in a bite. Surrounding agencies have similar statistics and those statistics were provided to Mr. Jackson during a joint meeting in early March of this year.

The data demonstrates that roughly 99% of K9 apprehensions never involve an actual bite. Rather, suspects overwhelmingly surrender upon hearing our announcements and seeing a police K9 in their sights. They would much rather surrender than engage a police K9. This proves that K9s are one of the most effective de-escalation tools available to our agency and to agencies throughout the state. However, if K9s are limited to bark and alert only, suspects are unlikely to surrender, which means that officers would need to use other use of force tactics to gain compliance.

Unlike a bullet that is destined to land upon its target once shot, K9s are a tool that can be summoned back if the suspect gives up. If, after a K9 latches on, the suspect gives up, the K9 handler is trained to give the dog commands to stop and pull the dog away from the suspect. The K9 is also trained to discontinue the bite upon hearing the specific command and is trained to obey the handler. This is accomplished by extensive initial training and continual ongoing training by our handlers and their dogs. In 2022, Murrieta PD K9 handlers trained with their K9 partners for over 1000 hours. Our K9 handlers are experts in de-escalation.

Mr. Jackson purports that 67.5% of K9 bites result in hospitalization while the use of other force options, like tasers, pepper spray, or batons, only results in 22% hospital visits. To the uninformed audience, this sounds like police K9s are statistically more dangerous and more likely to inflict harm than other force options. The reality is police agencies throughout the state use different metrics when determining when to hospitalize a suspect.

Our policy is to take a suspect to the hospital 100% of the time after receiving a K9 bite, regardless of if the person was injured or not. This is done to ensure the person receives professional medical attention to address their wounds, if any, and for liability reasons. However, if we applied Mr. Jackson's flawed logic here in Murrieta, our data would show that 100% of our K9 deployments / apprehensions resulted in hospitalization. But again, this is because our policy, is to take all of our apprehended felony suspects to the hospital after a K9 bite. Thus because of our policy, using Mr. Jackson's flawed logic, a casual observer would incorrectly require concluding that our K9s are disproportionately dangerous and injurious as compared to other force options. This logic is astonishingly misleading and inaccurately reflects reality.

Our policy on hospitalizing an arrestee after using other force options is dependent on the amount of force and tool used. For example, if an arrestee is pepper sprayed during an arrest, no hospitalization is required unless the person has an adverse reaction requiring additional medical attention other than what a paramedic or EMT can administer on scene.

Even more misleading, is how Mr. Jackson cited data from the DOJ indicating that 4 people died from K9 bites in 2021. This is, yet again, an inaccurate interpretation of data. Yes, the DOJ did report 4 people died after being apprehended by a K9. However, what he did not point out is that 3 out of the 4 suspects were in fact shot first, presumably by the police, prior to a K9 being sent. Thus, 3 out of 4 people died of a gunshot wound, not a K9's bite. Mr. Jackson further claims that in 2021, three-fourths of those killed by police K9s were people of color. While three-quarters of the people cited as dying from K9s were either Black or Hispanic, they died from a gunshot wound, not from a bite by a K9. The reality is that the only person that truly died from a K9 bite in 2021 was White. This is but another example of the author citing data inappropriately to push a false narrative and to mislead the people of California.

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In closing, after careful analysis of the facts and properly interpreting data and statistics, it is clear the use of K9s to apprehend felony suspects is highly effective, not racist, and is an excellent and proven de-escalation tool for law enforcement. If this bill passes as is, you will be taking away a valuable de-escalation tool and force law enforcement may have to use deadly force in cases where a K9 could have been able to diffuse the situation safely. I strongly urge you to vote NO on this bill after carefully evaluating the facts and data for yourselves.

Sincerely,



Lisa DeForest
Mayor – City of Murrieta



Anthony Conrad
Chief of Police – City of Murrieta