

1 A bill to be entitled
 2 An act relating to the canine support grant program
 3 for first responders; providing a short title;
 4 creating s. 943.701, F.S.; providing legislative
 5 findings and a purpose; defining the term "State Fire
 6 Marshal"; requiring the Department of Law Enforcement
 7 and the State Fire Marshal to establish and jointly
 8 administer the grant program; providing requirements
 9 for the grants awarded under the program; providing
 10 support dog requirements; providing handler
 11 requirements; providing agency eligibility
 12 requirements; providing application requirements;
 13 providing for oversight and annual reporting
 14 requirements; providing an effective date.

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 16 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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 18 **Section 1.** This act may be cited as the "Canine Heroes for
 19 First Responders Act."

20 **Section 2. Section 943.701, Florida Statutes, is created**
 21 **to read:**

22 943.701 Canine support grant program for first
 23 responders.-

24 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.-

25 (a) The Legislature finds that:

26 1. Law enforcement officers and first responders
27 experience significant mental health challenges due to
28 occupational stress;

29 2. Support dogs have been demonstrated to reduce stress,
30 improve emotional well-being, and support mental health in high-
31 stress work environments; and

32 3. A standardized approach to support dog acquisition,
33 training, and use will ensure the effectiveness and safety of
34 support dog programs.

35 (b) The purpose of this section is to establish a grant
36 program, administered jointly by the Department of Law
37 Enforcement and the Division of State Fire Marshal within the
38 Department of Financial Services, to provide funding to law
39 enforcement agencies and first responder agencies for the
40 procurement, training, and maintenance of support dogs to
41 enhance the mental health and wellness of their personnel.

42 (2) DEFINITION.—As used in this section, the term "State
43 Fire Marshal" means the Division of State Fire Marshal within
44 the Department of Financial Services.

45 (3) GRANT PROGRAM ESTABLISHMENT.—

46 (a) The department and the State Fire Marshal shall
47 jointly establish and administer a competitive grant program to
48 provide funding to law enforcement agencies and first responder
49 agencies for the procurement, training, and maintenance of
50 support dogs.

51 (b) Grants awarded under this section must be used to do
52 all of the following:

53 1. Procure support dogs that meet the requirements in
54 subsection (4).

55 2. Train handlers and establish effective support dog
56 teams.

57 3. Maintain the health, well-being, and training of the
58 support dogs.

59 4. Develop and implement law enforcement agency policies
60 and first responder agency policies for the deployment and
61 management of support dog teams.

62 5. Support the establishment of training standards for
63 handlers and support dog teams consistent with established best
64 practices, with up to 10 percent of the awarded funds allocated
65 to provide training on these standards.

66 (4) SUPPORT DOG REQUIREMENTS.—A support dog procured under
67 the grant program must meet all of the following requirements:

68 (a) Be spayed or neutered.

69 (b) Be medically cleared for support work by a licensed
70 veterinarian, including up-to-date vaccinations.

71 (c) Exhibit a temperament conducive to support work, with
72 no aggressive or overly protective behaviors.

73 (d) Demonstrate aptitude for support work, including being
74 friendly, approachable, and people oriented.

75 (e) Meet height and weight standards outlined by the grant

76 program, and measure between 20 and 30 inches at the withers,
77 ensuring the dogs are large enough for easy interaction with
78 people but not so large as to present kenneling and
79 transportation issues.

80 (f) Have never received any form of aggression training at
81 any stage of their lives.

82 (g) Demonstrate social behavior and trainability to a high
83 degree of obedience control, as evidenced by having passed the
84 American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen test or by having been
85 trained to an equivalent level.

86 (h) Successfully complete an evaluation by a professional
87 training organization.

88 (i) Be at least 1 year of age to ensure sufficient
89 maturity for support work.

90 (5) HANDLER REQUIREMENTS.—A handler for support dogs under
91 the grant program must meet all of the following requirements:

92 (a) Be a full-time employee of the law enforcement agency
93 or first responder agency receiving the grant.

94 (b) Complete certified handler training for working with
95 support dogs, including public access and emotional support
96 protocols.

97 (c) Demonstrate the ability to manage and care for a
98 support dog in the workplace.

99 (d) Pass a background check confirming suitability to work
100 in mental health and wellness roles.

101 (e) Commit to ongoing training and annual certification as
102 a support dog handler.

103 (6) AGENCY ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS.—A law enforcement
104 agency or first responder agency applying for a grant under this
105 section must meet all of the following requirements:

106 (a) Require all support dog teams to pass the American
107 Kennel Club Urban Canine Good Citizen Public Access Test or an
108 equivalent standardized evaluation.

109 (b) Adopt and implement a policy indicating that support
110 dogs are working animals specifically designated for mental
111 health and wellness purposes.

112 (c) Designate a program coordinator to oversee the
113 implementation and evaluation of the support dog program.

114 (d) Submit an annual report to the department and the
115 State Fire Marshal detailing the use, outcomes, and costs
116 associated with the support dog program.

117 (e) Provide appropriate facilities and resources for the
118 care and deployment of the support dogs.

119 (f) Develop training standards for handlers and support
120 dog teams, consistent with established best practices and in
121 collaboration with the department and the State Fire Marshal.

122 (7) APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS.—A law enforcement agency or
123 first responder agency that applies for a grant must submit an
124 application that includes all of the following:

125 (a) A description of the proposed support dog program.

126 (b) A justification of need for the support dog program in
127 the agency.

128 (c) A budget for the use of grant funds, including a
129 detailed allocation of up to 10 percent for training
130 initiatives.

131 (d) Policies and procedures for maintaining the health,
132 welfare, and effectiveness of support dog teams.

133 (8) OVERSIGHT AND REPORTS.—

134 (a) The department and the State Fire Marshal shall
135 jointly monitor grantee compliance with the requirements of this
136 section, including periodic reviews and site visits.

137 (b) A grant recipient shall submit an annual report to the
138 department and the State Fire Marshal detailing the outcomes and
139 effectiveness of the support dog program, including, but not
140 limited to, metrics such as employee satisfaction, whether there
141 was any reduction in stress levels, and the participation rate
142 of first responders of an eligible agency.

143 **Section 3.** This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.