

By Senator Collins

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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 to
 21 read:

22 943.701 Canine support grant program for first responders.-

23 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.-

24 (a) The Legislature finds that:

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

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

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

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

40 (2) DEFINITION.—As used in this section, the term “State
41 Fire Marshal” means the Division of State Fire Marshal within
42 the Department of Financial Services.

43 (3) GRANT PROGRAM ESTABLISHMENT.—

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

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

50 1. Procure support dogs that meet the requirements in
51 subsection (4).

52 2. Train handlers and establish effective support dog
53 teams.

54 3. Maintain the health, well-being, and training of the
55 support dogs.

56 4. Develop and implement law enforcement agency policies
57 and first responder agency policies for the deployment and
58 management of support dog teams.

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

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

65 (a) Be spayed or neutered.

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

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

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

72 (e) Meet height and weight standards outlined by the grant
73 program, and measure between 20 and 30 inches at the withers,
74 ensuring the dogs are large enough for easy interaction with
75 people but not so large as to present kenneling and
76 transportation issues.

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

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

83 (h) Successfully complete an evaluation by a professional
84 training organization.

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

87 (5) HANDLER REQUIREMENTS.—A handler for support dogs under

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88 the grant program must meet all of the following requirements:

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

91 (b) Complete certified handler training for working with
92 support dogs, including public access and emotional support
93 protocols.

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

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

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

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

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

106 (b) Adopt and implement a policy indicating that support
107 dogs are working animals specifically designated for mental
108 health and wellness purposes.

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

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

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

116 (f) Develop training standards for handlers and support dog

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117 teams, consistent with established best practices and in
118 collaboration with the department and the State Fire Marshal.

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

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

123 (b) A justification of need for the support dog program in
124 the agency.

125 (c) A budget for the use of grant funds, including a
126 detailed allocation of up to 10 percent for training
127 initiatives.

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

130 (8) OVERSIGHT AND REPORTS.—

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

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

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