Senate Executive Departments and Administration
February 11, 2026
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08/07

Amendment to SB 573

Amend the bill by replacing all after the enacting clause with the following:

1 New Chapter; Comfort Facility Dog Certification. Amend RSA by inserting after chapter 167-D the following new chapter:

CHAPTER 167-E

COMFORT FACILITY DOG CERTIFICATION

167-E:1 Definitions. In this chapter:

I. "Comfort Facility dog" means a specifically trained dog that provides emotional support, comfort, and crisis response to individuals, groups, and communities in various settings, such as hospitals, nursing homes, schools, disaster relief areas, emergency response/public safety agencies and other places where people may be experiencing stress, trauma, or crisis. Comfort facility dogs are trained to interact gently and empathetically with people, offering unconditional support and non-judgmental companionship to help alleviate anxiety, reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance overall well-being and resilience. Comfort facility dogs are not considered service dogs or emotional support animals.

II. "Comfort facility dog handler" means an emergency response or public safety worker who is responsible for the care, training, and supervision of a comfort facility dog during its interactions with individuals, groups, and communities in need of emotional support or crisis response. A comfort facility dog handler shall ensure that it behaves appropriately, follows commands, and maintains a calm and comforting presence in various environments. A comfort facility dog handler shall be trained to understand canine behavior, communication, and emotional support techniques, allowing them to effectively guide the comfort facility dog's interactions with individuals, groups, or communities in distress or crisis situations.

III. "Emergency response or public safety worker" means any law enforcement officer certified under RSA 106-L, certified county corrections officer, sheriff or deputy sheriff, state police officer, civilian law enforcement employee, civilian county corrections employee, any call, volunteer, or regular firefighter, civilian fire department employee, rescue or ambulance worker, including ambulance service, emergency medical personnel, first responder service, and volunteer personnel, telecommunicators, and local dispatchers, including any retired emergency response or public safety workers as defined in this section.

IV. "Local dispatcher" means a person who determines the location, status, and assistance required by callers and walk-in customers for public safety services and dispatches the appropriate

police, fire, ambulance, or other units to provide needed emergency services at the state, city, town, or private emergency services level.

V. "Telecommunicator" means an employee of the department of safety, division of emergency services and communications who is responsible for receiving at the public safety answering point telephone calls made to E911 and transferring or relaying such calls to public or private safety agencies.

VI. "Comfort facility dog team" means a trained comfort facility dog and its handler, working collaboratively to provide emotional support, comfort, and crisis response to individuals, groups, and communities in various settings. The comfort facility dog team shall undergo specialized training to develop skills in empathy, active listening, and non-verbal communication, enabling them to effectively respond to the emotional, behavioral, physical, cognitive, and relational needs of those they encounter.

VII. "Comfort facility dog trainer" means any person who is employed to train dogs for the use of a comfort facility dog or is volunteering and training to raise dogs for the use of comfort facility dogs by emergency response or public safety worker, or an individual trainer who helps an emergency response or public safety worker to train their comfort facility dog.

VIII. "Housing accommodation" means any publicly assisted housing accommodation or any real property, or portion thereof, which is used or occupied, or is intended, arranged, or designed to be used or occupied, as the home, residence, or sleeping place of one or more persons.

IX. "Public facility" means any place of public accommodation and any street, highway, sidewalk, walkway, public building, and any other place or structure to which the general public is regularly, normally, or customarily permitted or invited.

X. "Place of public accommodation" includes any tavern roadhouse, hotel, motel, or trailer camp, whether for entertainment of transient guests or accommodation of those seeking health, recreation, or rest; any producer, manufacturer, wholesaler, distributor, retail shop, store establishment, or concession dealing with goods or services of any kind; any restaurant, eating house, or place where food is sold for consumption on the premises; any place maintained for the sale of ice cream, ice, and fruit preparations or their derivatives, soda water or confections, or where any beverages of any kind are retailed for consumption on the premises; any garage; any public conveyance operated on land or water, or in the air, or any stations and terminals thereof; any bathhouse, boardwalk, or seashore accommodation; any auditorium, meeting place, or hall; any theater, motion picture house, music hall, roof garden, skating rink, swimming pool, amusement and recreation park, fair, bowling alley, gymnasium, shooting gallery, billiard and pool parlor, or any other place of amusement; any comfort station; any dispensary, clinic, or hospital; any public library; any kindergarten, primary and secondary school, trade or business school, high school, academy, college and university, or any educational institution under the supervision of the state board of education, or the commissioner of education of the state of New Hampshire.

167-E:2 Comfort Facility Dog Training.

I. The initial training and certification shall be completed by the dog's second birthday. Such initial training and certification shall be comprised of the following American Kennel Club certifications:

(a) Canine Good Citizen (CGC).

(b) Advanced Canine Good Citizen (CGCA).

(c) Urban Canine Good Citizen (CGCU).

II. The ongoing training shall be comprised of the following:

(a) A minimum of 1 hour per month of structured training. Training should focus on maintaining and reinforcing CGC, CGCA, and CGCU skills.

(b) Exposure to various emergency or public safety environments, including interactions with first responders and the public.

(c) Sit training.

(d) Psychological first aid training.

III. The emergency services or public safety agency employing or owning the comfort facility dog shall maintain detailed training records. Records shall include:

(a) Dates and duration of training sessions.

(b) The type of training conducted.

(c) Progress and any corrective actions needed.

(d) Certification completion and renewal dates.

IV. Any comfort facility dog who begins their initial training after the effective date of this chapter shall not be certified under this chapter unless they are owned by the facility in which they are employed.

167-E:3 Comfort Facility Dog Handler Training.

I. Each comfort facility dog handler working with the comfort facility dog shall complete training with his or her assigned comfort facility dog. Such training and certification shall be comprised of the following American Kennel Club certifications:

(a) Canine Good Citizen (CGC).

(b) Advanced Canine Good Citizen (CGCA).

(c) Urban Canine Good Citizen (CGCU).

II. The following training shall also be required of comfort facility dog handlers:

(a) Training on recognizing and responding to individuals experiencing mental health crises.

(b) Education on crisis intervention techniques for first emergency response or public safety workers, including CIT training.

(c) Training on providing basic emergency care and first aid for canine partners.

III. The ongoing training shall be comprised of the following:

(a) A minimum of one hour per month of structured training with the comfort facility dog. Training should focus on reinforcing AKC certification skills, handling techniques, and scenario-based public interactions.

(b) Regular exposure to emergency/public safety environments to maintain proficiency.

IV. The emergency services or public safety agency employing or owning the comfort facility dog shall maintain detailed training records for both the dog and handler. Records shall include:

(a) Dates and duration of training sessions.

(b) The type of training conducted.

(c) Progress and any corrective actions needed.

(d) Certification completion and renewal dates.

167-E:4 Animal Duties. The official duties performed by a comfort facility dog shall be directly related to the handler's roll as an emergency response or public safety worker. Official duties may include but are not limited to: critical incident stress management, survivor advocacy and support, school support, crisis response, community mental health support, community relations.

167-E:5 Comfort Facility Dog Licensing, Rabies Certificate and Insurance.

I. The owner of the comfort facility dog shall comply with all state and local ordinances regarding licensing and rabies certification under RSA 466:1 and RSA 466:1-a. The owner of the comfort facility dog shall also fully insure the dog for the duration of its service career.

II. Nothing in this section is intended to inhibit, interfere or impede with the protections provided to service animals and search and rescue dogs under RSA 167-D.

III. The decision to spay or neuter a comfort facility dog shall be determined by the recommendation of the dog's veterinarian.

167-E:6 Comfort Facility Dog Team Certification.

I. Each comfort facility dog team shall complete all training requirements outlined within the comfort facility dog training under RSA 167-E:2, and comfort facility dog handler training under RSA 167-E:3 in order to be certified in the state of New Hampshire.

II. Each comfort facility dog team shall complete the following certification exams every 3 years, from the date of their initial certification, to remain certified:

(a) Canine Good Citizen (CGC).

(b) Advanced Canine Good Citizen (CGCA).

(c) Urban Canine Good Citizen (CGCU).

III. The emergency services or public safety agency owning or employing the comfort facility dog shall maintain all training and certification records, including:

(a) Initial therapy dog certification documentation.

(b) Recertification dates and results.

(c) Any ongoing training or corrective action records.

IV. All comfort facility dog teams working in the state of New Hampshire shall have one year from the effective date of this chapter to meet certification and recertification requirements outlined therein.

167-E:7 Comfort Facility Dog May Accompany. A comfort facility dog may accompany their handler into any public facility, housing accommodation, or place of public accommodation to which the general public is invited, while they are in the course of performing their official duties, and/or, while in the course of, or traveling to or from the location of, their official duties.

167-E:8 Prohibited Acts.

I. It is unlawful for a person, directly or indirectly, either to prohibit, hinder, or interfere with a comfort facility dog team, while in the course of performing their official duties.

II. It is unlawful for any person to represent, and/or fit, a dog with a collar, leash, vest, sign, or harness of any type which represents that the dog is a comfort facility dog if the dog is not a comfort facility dog certified under this chapter.

167-E:9 Comfort Facility Dog Care.

I. A comfort facility dog shall not be fed a raw diet in order to minimize food borne diseases that may be unintentionally transmitted to humans.

II. A comfort facility dog shall be confined when traveling above 55 miles per hour. Confinement may be a crate or tether attached to a harness but not to a collar. A remote temperature sensor shall be placed in any vehicle in which the comfort facility dog will be left unattended.

III. No prong or electronic collars or head halters shall be used for American Kennel Club testing and no dog may wear prong or electronic collars or head halters while being deployed.

167-E:10 Comfort Facility Dog Retirement. Each emergency response or public safety agency employing a comfort facility dog shall have a policy which outlines the comfort facility dog's safe and humane retirement. If it is determined that a comfort facility dog in training cannot meet the standards set forth in this chapter, such policy shall outline the comfort facility dog's permanent ownership, and/or, options to return to the agency, non-profit, business or breeder the comfort facility dog was obtained from 167-E:

2 Effective Date. This act shall take effect 60 days after its passage.