

SB 573 - VERSION ADOPTED BY BOTH BODIES

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2026 SESSION

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SENATE BILL **573**

AN ACT establishing certification standards for certified public safety comfort dogs.

SPONSORS: Sen. Birdsell, Dist 19; Sen. Fenton, Dist 10; Sen. Gannon, Dist 23; Sen. Pearl, Dist 17; Sen. Ward, Dist 8; Rep. Moffett, Merr. 4; Rep. Morton, Hills. 39

COMMITTEE: Executive Departments and Administration

AMENDED ANALYSIS

This bill establishes certification standards for certified public safety comfort dogs, certified public safety comfort dog handlers, and certified public safety comfort dog handling teams.

Explanation: Matter added to current law appears in ***bold italics***.
Matter removed from current law appears ~~[in brackets and struckthrough]~~
Matter which is either (a) all new or (b) repealed and reenacted appears in regular type.

In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Twenty-Six

AN ACT establishing certification standards for certified public safety comfort dogs.

Be it Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court convened:

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

CHAPTER 167-E

PUBLIC SAFETY COMFORT DOG CERTIFICATION

167-E:1 Definitions. In this chapter:

I. "Certified public safety comfort dog" means a specifically trained dog that provides 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. Certified public safety comfort 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. Certified public safety comfort dogs are not considered service dogs or emotional support animals.

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

1 IV. "Local dispatcher" means a person who determines the location, status, and assistance
2 required by callers and walk-in customers for public safety services and dispatches the appropriate
3 police, fire, ambulance, or other units to provide needed emergency services at the state, city, town,
4 or private emergency services level.

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

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

15 VII. "Certified public safety comfort dog trainer" means any person who is employed to train
16 dogs for the use of a certified public safety comfort dog or is volunteering and training to raise dogs
17 for the use of certified public safety comfort dogs by emergency response or public safety workers, or
18 an individual trainer who helps an emergency response or public safety worker to train their
19 certified public safety comfort dog.

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

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

26 X. "Place of public accommodation" includes any tavern roadhouse, hotel, motel, or trailer
27 camp, whether for entertainment of transient guests or accommodation of those seeking health,
28 recreation, or rest; any producer, manufacturer, wholesaler, distributor, retail shop, store
29 establishment, or concession dealing with goods or services of any kind; any restaurant, eating
30 house, or place where food is sold for consumption on the premises; any place maintained for the sale
31 of ice cream, ice, and fruit preparations or their derivatives, soda water or confections, or where any
32 beverages of any kind are retailed for consumption on the premises; any garage; any public
33 conveyance operated on land or water, or in the air, or any stations and terminals thereof; any
34 bathhouse, boardwalk, or seashore accommodation; any auditorium, meeting place, or hall; any
35 theater, motion picture house, music hall, roof garden, skating rink, swimming pool, amusement and
36 recreation park, fair, bowling alley, gymnasium, shooting gallery, billiard and pool parlor, or any
37 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 Certified Public Safety Comfort Dog Training.

I. The initial training and certification testing shall be completed by the dog's second birthday. Such initial training and certification shall be comprised of the following American Kennel Club certificates, or an equivalent certificate from another nationally recognized organization:

- (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 shall focus on maintaining and reinforcing CGC, CGCA, and CGCU skills.
- (b) Exposure to various emergencies or public safety environments, including interactions with first responders and the public.

III. The emergency response or public safety agency employing or owning the certified public safety comfort 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) Certificate completion and renewal dates.

167-E:3 Certified Public Safety Comfort Dog Handler Training.

I. Each certified public safety comfort dog handler working with the certified public safety comfort dog shall complete training with his or her assigned certified public safety comfort dog. Such training and certificate testing shall be comprised of the following American Kennel Club certificates, or an equivalent certificate from another nationally recognized organization:

- (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 certified public safety comfort dog handlers:

- (a) Training on recognizing and responding to individuals experiencing mental health crises.
- (b) Education on crisis intervention techniques for 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 certified public safety comfort dog. Training shall focus on reinforcing RSA 167-E:2 certification skills, handling techniques, and scenario-based public interactions.

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

IV. The emergency response or public safety agency employing or owning the certified public safety comfort 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) Certificate completion and renewal dates.

167-E:4 Animal Duties. The official duties performed by a certified public safety comfort dog shall be directly related to the handler's role 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, and community relations.

167-E:5 Certified Public Safety Comfort Dog Licensing, Rabies Certificate and Insurance.

I. The owner or employer of the certified public safety comfort 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 or employer of the certified public safety comfort 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.

167-E:6 Certified Public Safety Comfort Dog Team Certification.

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

II. Each certified public safety comfort dog shall be retested with his or her assigned certified public safety comfort dog every 3 years. Such retesting shall be comprised of the following American Kennel Club certificates or an equivalent certificate from another nationally recognized organization:

(a) Canine Good Citizen (CGC).

(b) Advanced Canine Good Citizen (CGCA).

(c) Urban Canine Good Citizen (CGCU).

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

(a) Initial certification documentation.

1 (b) Recertification dates and results.

2 (c) Any ongoing training or corrective action records.

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

6 167-E:7 Certified Public Safety Dog May Accompany Handler. A certified public safety comfort
7 dog may accompany their handler into any public facility, housing accommodation, or place of public
8 accommodation to which the general public is invited, while they are in the course of performing
9 their official duties, and/or, while in the course of, or traveling to or from the location of, their official
10 duties.

11 167-E:8 Prohibited Acts.

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

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

17 167-E:9 Certified Public Safety Dog Care.

18 I. A certified public safety comfort dog shall be confined when traveling above 55 miles per
19 hour. Confinement may be a crate or tether attached to a harness but not to a collar. A remote
20 temperature sensor shall be placed in any vehicle in which the certified public safety comfort dog
21 will be left unattended.

22 II. No prong or electronic collars shall be used for American Kennel Club testing, and no dog
23 may wear prong or electronic collars while being deployed.

24 III. The decision to spay or neuter a certified public safety comfort dog shall be determined
25 by the recommendation of the dog's veterinarian.

26 167-E:10 Certified Public Safety Comfort Dog Retirement. Each emergency response or public
27 safety agency employing a certified public safety comfort dog shall have a policy which outlines the
28 certified public safety comfort dog's safe and humane retirement. If it is determined that a certified
29 public safety comfort dog in training cannot meet the standards set forth in this chapter, such policy
30 shall outline the certified public safety comfort dog's permanent ownership, and/or, options to return
31 to the agency, non-profit, business or breeder the certified public safety comfort dog was obtained
32 from.

33 2 Effective Date. This act shall take effect 60 days after its passage.