



# Working Dogs Oregon

Advocating and Educating for all that dogs do for us

Testimony for HB 2304 House Judiciary Committee February 6<sup>th</sup> 2023

Good morning, Chair Kropf and members of the Committee,

My name is Darin Campbell and I am the Executive Director of Working Dogs Oregon. We are a 501c3 non-profit organization. We started from personal experiences surrounding my wife's service dog and realized there needed to be advocacy for service dog handlers and education for the general public and business community. It did not take long for us to decide to advocate for all working dogs. We firmly believe dogs make lives better for humans through the work they do.

In 2018, we decided to scholarship two K9s to Oregon police agencies who otherwise may not have the resources to get them. Teaming up with Howling Creek K9 in Sumner, Oregon, we donated K9 Bali to Pendleton Police and K9 Gus to Central Point Police. Since then, we have had a hand in bringing two additional patrol dogs to Oregon policing. K9 Hank we purchased from a California agency and donated him to the Portland Police Bureau. He certified last year. Also, K9 Bruno who came from a bad situation in California, saved by the South Coast Humane Society in Brookings who called us and we placed him with the Lane County Sheriff's office. Bruno certified 3 weeks ago.

Working with police K9 for the last several years has created new missions for us. We travel the state hosting K9 first aid courses free of charge to any police K9 handler. We have trained over 100 handlers in what to do to save their dog partners lives in an emergency. We have provided over 70 K9 First Aid kits to Oregon Police Handlers. Lastly, we will donate a Victim support/wellness therapy dog to any department that requests one. Currently we have 5 dogs working with victims and this last November we donated Eastern Oregon's First Victims Advocate dog to the Union County District Attorney's office.

We are very invested in the health, wellbeing and advancement of the Oregon Police K9 Community from first training session through retirement.

Which brings me to HB 2304, The Oregon K9 Cares act. This bill will create a fund to offset the burden caretakers of retired K9s gladly accept. Police dogs who track people, detect drugs and

explosives are high drive dogs and it takes special people to be their handlers, almost all continue to care for these dogs in retirement.

These teams spend nearly every minute of every day together. The handler grows to depend on their canine partner almost more than the dog depends on them. In some cases, the dog in the back of the car is the only back up an officer has close by. You can imagine the bond that is formed with this type of partnership.

In most cases when a dog retires the agency will sell them to the handler for a tiny amount, usually a dollar. At that point the dog becomes the full responsibility of the handler. The costs of this responsibility can be extreme. HB 2304 would call for a \$1,000 annual payment to the caretakers of these dogs. This amount, in no way covers all the costs an older dog would incur in a year, but would offset some of the burden.

Another important aspect of this bill is reimbursement of up to \$5,000 for emergency veterinary care. We want to be able to remove financial barriers and provide proper care to these dogs who give so much to our state. A veterinary bill of significant cost can be difficult to recover from and we felt this amount was reasonable. The bill requires consultation with a member of the veterinary industry on applications for funding to ensure the care is reasonable and aligns with care that should be expected.

A qualified K9, as described in this bill, is one who was certified in accordance with Oregon law and worked at least three years unless injured while performing its duties causing early retirement. These stipulations need to be verified by the agency the dog worked for.

A change I would like to see in this bill would be a change of line 7, Section 1 Subsection (2) to read that the Non-Profit organization awarded this grant be one that works and advocates for working dogs on a state level. Then delete line 11 as it would be covered with this change.

Working Dogs Oregon would apply to receive this grant from DPSST and we are prepared to administer this program at no cost to ensure we can get the most support to the caretakers who need it.

We have requested a survey from the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police and the Oregon State Sheriffs Association and based on those survey results we believe there are between 100 and 120 retired Police K9s who would qualify for this support. Because of this we would ask for a second change in that the expenditure amount be increased from \$150,000 to \$250,000

I would urge committee passage HB 2304 and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.