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Sarah LaTourette
Assistant Majority Floor Leader

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House Bill 349 Sponsor Testimony October 17, 2017

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze and members of the House Criminal Justice committee, thank you for allowing me to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 349.

This legislation has two main provisions. The first provision would increase the penalty for assaulting a police animal. You may remember House Bill 447 from the last General Assembly that increased penalties for intentionally harming a police animal when that harm resulted in the animal's death. I agree that it is important for increased penalties to be placed on an individual in the event that they intentionally kill a police animal, but I also strongly believe that increased penalties are needed in situations where the harm to the animal, thankfully, did not result in its death. House Bill 349 increases penalties in the following ways:

1. When a police animal is assaulted, regardless of the severity of the injury, the potential penalty would increase from a 2nd degree misdemeanor to a 4th degree felony.
2. If the assault ultimately leads to the police animal's death, the penalty would increase from a 3rd degree felony to a 2nd degree felony.
3. Lastly, in a situation where the police animal does not die, but suffers serious physical harm, the penalty would increase from a 4th degree felony to a 3rd degree felony.

The other provision of House Bill 349 is to provide search and rescue animals (dogs and horses) the same protection from harm and interference as is provided for police animals. Our state is lucky to have a number of professional search and rescue volunteers who answer calls from law enforcement to assist in search and rescue

77 South High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111
Phone: (614)644-5088
Email: Rep76@ohiohouse.gov

activities. Whether these be missing persons situations, or a human remains detection search, these volunteers are an incredibly valuable resource to our state. While the majority of search and rescue missions are lower risk, when compared to that of a police animal, there is always the possibility that an individual may wish to interfere with the search efforts or even bring harm to the animals performing this important task. Ohio law, as it currently stands, makes no reference to search and rescue animals, while a number of other states have laws prohibiting interference in the work of search and rescue animals, prohibiting bringing harm to search and rescue animals, or both. (note - at least Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Montana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee, Florida, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming have laws relating to this).

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze and members of the House Criminal Justice committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify on HB 349. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.