

Proponent Testimony offered by Matt Hickey
November 30, 2016
Ohio Senate Agriculture Committee
Senate Bill 271

Chairman Hite, Vice Chairman Hackett, and Ranking Member Gentile - My wife and I are here to support the bill and thank the Senators in finding time to put together this information.

Some facts that lead to this were that at the beginning of the year K9 Ajax and I were in a dilemma. I needed time to heal from an accident that occurred at work and due to manpower shortage, I decided to go ahead and retire.

Over the next few weeks, for a variety of reasons, my family and I were left questioning whether or not Ajax would be able to retire with me. The Ohio Revised Code was not clear about the ability for a retiring officer to purchase a canine officer, and since the canine in my case still had a useful life, he was considered to be useful property under law according to interpretation. Everyone wanted to comply with state law, so there was a lot of confusion about what to do. At one point during this dilemma, it was interpreted that I would need to purchase Ajax for \$3,500 because he was useful property to the city. My family and I did fundraise that amount, but then it was again questioned if we were allowed to do that.

Soon cooler heads prevailed and K9 Ajax and I were able to stay together for a dollar. However, this may not be the case if this same issue occurs in the future because it could be interpreted a number of ways.

The incident sparked a lot of news coverage and input from officers across the state and country. This situation, or something like it, could happen to anyone, and many people were fearful for their canine partner's status. Right or wrong, the situation could have been avoided if 9.62 in the Revised Code outlined a way, from the beginning, for me, a retiring officer, to purchase Ajax.

Whether or not the original situation was misinterpreted, the point remains that there was significant confusion and stress for all involved with the K9 Ajax scenario. The bond between handler and dog is strong and unique. To suddenly try to end that relationship could be harmful for both the officer and the dog, as well as the department served, so it is necessary that there be a clear way, in state law, for an officer to purchase his or her K9.

There was some good that came out of this incident: a 33 year police veteran (who worked mostly on the third shift) learned that there is a lot of great people around; the \$70,000 in the Gofund me went to Vested Interest in K9s (a Non-Profit Organization) where about 65 law enforcement dogs received ballistic vests; and last but not least K9 Ajax is still in my family.

A lot of work goes into training and working a law enforcement K9 by the handlers. A unique bond is made between the K9 and the handler, which is hard to break even by the death of the K9. It is important to that K9 and handler have the opportunity to stay together. We appreciate that this bill allows for a way for the officer to make that purchase, and allows the department to have input as well.