

Information for Departments to Consider

before selecting an officer to apply for a service dog from:
Puppies Behind Bars “Service Dogs for Those Who Serve & Protect”[®]

Puppies Behind Bars is happy to gift service dogs to police departments to assist with officer wellness and community policing. However, we do have some conditions and a screening process through which we determine an appropriate match for one of our dogs. Our application screening process is a result of over 20 years of experience of knowing what helps our dogs succeed and the quality of life they need to maintain in order to cope with the demands of working. Since the application we receive will have been filled out and submitted by the officer you've selected to handle the dog, we wanted to share with you the criteria we're looking for in a candidate in advance of your selection. We also wanted to share some of the roadblocks and talking points we've run across with other departments who were incorporating a PBB service dog into their department.

Before selecting a handler:

- Determine who within the town or municipality also needs to grant permission to incorporate a service dog into the department. Does the union approve? Are there any concessions that need to be made? How will the selected officer be compensated for the extra hours or work?
- Have a plan and budget in place for providing for the food, supplies, and the veterinary needs of the service dog. **PBB requires that our dogs are fed a prescription diet dog food called Metabolic to prevent weight gain and that our dogs receive three monthly preventative medications for heartworms, fleas and ticks year-round. We estimate the cost of caring for a service dog at about \$2000 annually, but that doesn't include expenses resulting from injury or illness the dog might contract while working.** While Puppies Behind Bars is donating a completely healthy dog, and supplying its medical records from the time it was born until the time he goes to your department, unforeseen medical issues might arise, and vet bills can be expensive.
- Make sure there is a position for community policing already in place. PBB has learned from recent department dog placements that it is much more difficult for a patrolman to incorporate a dog into the department and into his or her shift. As such, we've made it a requirement that the role of community policing already exists and that the officer selected is assigned to the position before acquiring one of our dogs.
- Understand one dog's limitations. Even the best trained service dog cannot do all things for all people within the department without accumulating excessive amounts of stress which can and will break down the dog's training and behavior in public. One dog cannot provide comfort to officers within the department **and** meet and greet community members in public places, **and** go to large community events, **and** visit schools, **and** comfort crime victims. We suggest prioritizing the needs you want the dog to meet within the department. If you do want a dog to soothe a lot of different constituents, consider requesting two service dogs from PBB and assigning the dogs to two handlers, in order to lighten the load.

PBB's criteria when choosing a handler include but are not limited to:

- The officer needs to have worked at least 5 years as a police officer, two of which were served in your department.
- The officer must be willing to keep the dog at home, even during time off and holidays.
- The officer has no more than one dog already in the home.
- The officer doesn't have any impending major life transitions (new baby, moving, marriage/ divorce) and can provide a safe, stable home.
- The officer must be able to provide breaks throughout his or her shift for the dog to eliminate and/or play fetch to decompress.
- The officer is able to provide a daily minimum of an hour of off-leash exercise, including hiking, swimming or playing fetch outdoors (in more than just a back yard) despite the weather.
- The officer is willing and able to attend a two-week training conducted by PBB to match him or her with a dog that PBB has deemed appropriate and to use and care for that dog ongoing. PBB pays all costs associated with the training.
- The officer agrees to biannual follow up via emails/ phone calls for updates on dog's condition and care as well as annual public access tests conducted by PBB staff to assure the dog's training and well-being are maintained to PBB standards. The officer also agrees to a home visit four to six weeks post-graduation to help troubleshoot any issues the team may have encountered.
- The officer has a solid plan in place with the department about how the dog will be incorporated into his or her position.

Other talking points:

- Safety measures need to be in place in the event that officer/ handler of the service dog needs to respond to a call. Is there an enclosed place at the station where the dog can rest? Is someone available to supervise the dog? How does the officer get the dog back to the station? Will he or she be able to request relief or will someone be designated to retrieve the dog?
- The vehicle the dog is transported in needs to be equipped with heat sensors and alarms in the event that the officer needs to address a situation without the dog in tow.
- The officer/handler should be given an hour during his or her shift to exercise the dog nearby.
- In the event that the officer is unable to provide care for the dog due to sickness, injury, etc., the dog needs to return to PBB. The department will not just reassign the dog to an officer/handler PBB doesn't know and hasn't trained.
- If the officer goes on vacation or is temporarily unable to care for the dog, the dog will be hosted by PBB. PBB will cover all of the dog's expenses while in our care.
- Halfway through training PBB instructors conduct a mid-term evaluation for each dog/handler and at the end of training we evaluate them via a Public Access Test, which is standard in the service dog industry. In both instances we will share our feedback with the officer via private conferences but will also submit written copies of the mid-term evaluation and the results of the Public Access test to Department Chief's.