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AB 742: Use of Force: Police Canines

BILL SUMMARY:

AB 742 will prohibit the use of police canines for arrest, apprehension, or any form of crowd control.

BACKGROUND:

The use of police canines has been a mainstay in this country's dehumanizing, cruel, and violent abuse of Black Americans and people of color for centuries. As noted by the University Michigan Law Journal, "whether extreme and violent or subtle and pervasive, the use of dogs in oppressive acts is a critical layer of racial bias in the United States that has consistently built injustices that impede social and legal progress."¹

First used by slave catchers, police canines are a violent carry-over from America's dark past. They have been used in brutal attempts to quell the Civil Rights Movement, the LA Race Riots, and in response to Black Lives Matter protests,² in addition to their use in routine policing.³ They make people fear and further distrust the police, resulting in less safety and security for all, especially for communities of color. Furthermore, policing experts and civil rights scholars alike have called for an end to the use of police canines.⁴

PROBLEM:

The use of police canines has severe and potentially deadly consequences for bite victims. In a Police Assessment Resource Center (PARC) study of police canine bites, researchers found that bites resulted in hospital visits 67.5% of the time. In contrast, other uses of force, (outside of firearms) including batons and tasers, resulted in hospital visits 22% of the time or less.⁵

These same researchers found that police canine bites led to permanent physical disfigurement and injuries to bones, blood vessels, nerves, breasts, testicles, faces, noses, and eyes, sometimes causing blindness.⁶

Based on these findings, researchers have also found that police canine bites should be considered a level of force immediately below that of deadly force. Specifically, these findings equated a police canine bite to an officer swinging a baton with three-centimeter spikes attached.⁷

Per the California Department of Justice (DOJ) Use of Force Data from 2021, injuries caused by police canines accounted for nearly 12% of cases that resulted in severe injury or death. Of these cases, nearly two-thirds of people seriously injured or killed by police canines were Black or Latino. Additionally, Black people were 2.6 times more likely to be seriously injured by police canines than white people.⁸

Recently in California, members of the public have been scalped, dismembered, disemboweled, and even killed by police canines, with many of these injuries being accidental.⁹

SOLUTION:

AB 742 seeks to end a deeply racialized, traumatic, and harmful practice by prohibiting the use of police canines for arrest, apprehension, or any form of crowd control.

This bill will not prevent the use of police canines for search and rescue, explosives detection, and narcotics detection that do not involve biting.

SUPPORT:

ACLU California Action (cosponsor)
California Hawaii NAACP (cosponsor)

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¹ [Man's Best Friend? How Dogs Have Been Used to Oppress African Americans \(umich.edu\)](#)

² [Police Dogs and Anti-Black Violence](#)

³ [We're Tracking Police Dog Bites Across the Country | The Marshall Project](#)

⁴ [Don't overlook one of the most brutal and unnecessary parts of policing: Police dogs.](#)

⁵ [So Far This Year, L.A. County Sheriff's Dogs Have Only Bitten People of Color](#)

⁶ [Ibid](#)

⁷ [Ibid](#)

⁸ [Use of Force Incident Reporting 2021 \(ca.gov\)](#)

⁹ [Police K-9s cause serious injuries throughout the Bay Area.](#)



TALKING POINTS: AB 742 (Jackson) – Use of Force: Police Canines

AB 742 will end the deeply racialized, traumatic, and harmful practices of using police canines to attack people and to terrify and intimidate at public demonstrations.

- Attack dogs were first used by slave catchers, later used to attempt to quell the civil rights movement, and more recently used as an attempt to silence Black Lives Matter protesters.
- According to recent California Department of Justice data, nearly two-thirds of people seriously injured or killed by police dogs were Black or Latino, and Black people were 2.6 times more likely to be seriously injured by police canines than white people.
- These uses of police canines make people fear and further distrust the police, resulting in less safety and security for all—especially communities of color.

Deploying dogs to bite people is unnecessarily dangerous. Attack dogs violently escalate situations.

- The vast majority of people seriously injured by police canines are unarmed, and roughly half are reported to be people with a mental disability or who are in crisis.
- Using police attack dogs makes situations that could be resolved through safer methods and de-escalation more dangerous and is at odds with state de-escalation mandates and training.
- Someone who is terrified or in pain during a dog mauling will not be able to comply with officer commands – yet too often, police respond to someone instinctively defending themselves against a dog’s attack by shooting and killing the individual.
- Police canines regularly maul innocent bystanders and fail to recall or release bites when commanded. Just as we would not allow police to carry a firearm that we knew would sometimes fire at random, we should not allow police to weaponize animals we know uncontrollably and indiscriminately attack.

Research and data show that California can safely de-weaponize police canines.

- An empirical study showed that discontinuing the use of attack canines did not result in an increase in suspect or officer injury or suspect resistance during arrests.
- The bill will not prevent the use of police canines for search and rescue, explosives detection, and narcotics detection that rely on canines’ sense of smell and do not involve biting.

Police canine bites result in permanent disfigurement and injuries, lost body parts, and even death.

- The jaws of a police canine have enough force to break through sheet metal. Their bites have been compared to getting run over by a car or attacked by a shark.
- Without legislative action, people whose only crime was to be in the path of a police canine will continue to suffer permanent, life-threatening injuries, with wounds disproportionately inflicted on people of color.
- We all deserve to live safely and with dignity. But law enforcement use of canines to terrify and attack people is cruel and inhumane. Our people, and our dogs, deserve better.