Police/Canine Protection Act

The Police/Canine Protection Act would mandate police training for dog encounters in California to curb the epidemic of preventable dog shootings.

Problem: According to a U.S. Department of Justice estimate, police officers shoot and kill more than 10,000 pet dogs in the U.S. every year. From SWAT raids to simple calls and even visits to wrong addresses, incidents of officers using lethal force against a family pet are increasing. Police officers are likely to encounter dogs once out of every three house calls due to the vast number of pets, guard dogs, and strays. Although incidents of dog bites have decreased, it has not translated to an expected reduction in unnecessary fatalities to household pets. Despite the fact that police officers would choose to avoid a lethal confrontation with a dog, it is estimated that every 98 minutes a dog is killed by law enforcement in the United States.

Solution: Requiring mandatory police officer training would benefit both the officer and the dog by educating officers to quickly assess and read the body language of a dog and to recognize the difference between a dangerous situation and a situation in which there is the opportunity for the guardian of the dog to secure it safely. This is vital, as in most instances, a caretaker can contain a pet when the police are involved or are in close proximity.

Background Information

Training works to protect officers and dogs: In states that have addressed the need for training, officers are successfully handling canine encounters and fewer dogs are being shot as a result.

Colorado – SB13-226, the "Police/Canine Encounter" bill was signed into law by Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper on May 13, 2013. The measure requires additional training programs to help prevent shooting of pet dogs by law enforcement officers. http://www.inquisitr.com/839155/dont-shoot-my-dog-bill-protects-dogs-from-police-shooting/#y1Y3WQz2UmpSCAig.99

Texas – The Texas House voted unanimously for a police canine training program, House Bill 593 by state Representative Nicole Collier, D-Fort Worth, which established a statewide training requirement for law enforcement officers that teaches them how to deal with canine encounters on the job. The training program requires four hours of classroom instruction on understanding canine behavior, distinguishing between friendly and aggressive dogs and employing non-lethal methods to defend against a canine attack. The bill was backed by many police groups like the Combined Law Enforcement Association of Texas. Since the law was passed and implemented the shootings of pets has plummeted.

Wisconsin – Milwaukee police training began in 2012. Between 2000 and 2008, Milwaukee police shot and killed 434 dogs, an average of 48 per year. Since then, the statistics have improved

markedly. There were 41 dogs killed in 2009, and by 2012 the number was down to 28, according to the Fire and Police Commission. http://www.twincities.com/2014/06/14/milwaukee-police-no-longer-shooting-as-many-dogs-thanks-in-part-to-training/

Police want to learn alternatives to lethal force: Police officers have reported feeling grief and regret after shooting and killing a family pet. Through training, police officers would learn how to properly handle frequent encounters with dogs through non-lethal means. **Quote**: *In 2015, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) developed mandatory instruction and began training officers to recognize aggressive dog behavior and how to use catchpoles when encountering these dogs. To date in 2016, the LVMPD has had no incidents of deadly force encounters against a dog. The implementation of the catchpoles has reduced the fear of officers in stopping and neutralizing the threat of dogs. Moving forward the LVMPD will continue to train our officers annually, giving them refresher courses on dog encounters. As always it is LVMPD's goal to use deadly force only as a last resort as in the prevention of death or serious bodily injury to humans. With proper training, we are hoping that future encounters will be less likely.* -Officer Larry Hadfield, Office of Public Information, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department

Growing publicity against law enforcement is negative: With a large number of shootings now going viral due to being filmed on bystander's cell phones and security cameras, the public is able to observe the specific incidents. Protests against law enforcement and public outcry exacerbate trust issues between police and those they serve and protect. Adding to the bad publicity of having used lethal force against a dog, lawsuits are on the rise awarding significant settlement money to owners of the killed dogs. In January, officials in Commerce City, Colorado, agreed to pay $262,500 to the family of a mixed-breed dog named Chloe who was fatally shot by an officer in 2012. The Detroit City Council agreed in February to pay a $100,000 settlement to the owner of Babycakes, a mixed-breed dog killed by police in 2015.

Additional information
- The Officer Down Memorial Page, a nonprofit that tracks officers killed in the line of duty, cites that an on-duty officer hasn't died of a dog bite in the United States since 1936.
- The recently released documentary, OF DOGS AND MEN, has highlighted why this training would benefit every police department and has been supported all over social media.
- https://puppycidedb.com (organization devoted to the complete compilation and statistical research of shootings of animals by police)