

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Senator Thomas Umberg, Chair
2025-2026 Regular Session

AB 463 (Michelle Rodriguez)
Version: June 13, 2025
Hearing Date: July 1, 2025
Fiscal: Yes
Urgency: No
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SUBJECT

Emergency medical services: dogs and cats

DIGEST

This bill authorizes specified ambulance operators to transport a police canine or a search and rescue dog injured in the line of duty to a specified facility, as provided. The bill authorizes emergency responders to provide basic first aid to such dogs during transit and provides them qualified immunity.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Veterinary Medicine Practice Act makes it unlawful for any person to practice veterinary medicine, or any branch thereof, in this State unless at the time of so doing, such person holds a valid, unexpired, and unrevoked license. This includes the administering of a drug, medicine, appliance, application, or treatment of whatever nature for the prevention, cure, or relief of a wound, fracture, bodily injury, or disease of animals. Anyone violating these laws is guilty of a misdemeanor.

SB 1305 (Glazer, Ch. 900, Stats. 2018) authorized an emergency responder to provide basic first aid, as specified, to a dog or a cat, without being in violation of the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act.

This bill responds to concerns about the barriers to police dogs and search and rescue dogs receiving emergency care when they are injured in the line of duty. This bill authorizes ambulances to transport such animals in certain situations and specifically authorizes emergency responders to provide first aid while the dogs are being transported to a veterinary clinic or similar facility. Such responders are provided qualified immunity in connection with the provision of this care. This bill is author-sponsored. It is supported by the California Professional Firefighters and the California Veterinary Medical Association. No timely opposition has been received by the Committee. The bill passed out of the Senate Health Committee on a vote of 9 to 0.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LAW

Existing law:

- 1) Provides that every person is responsible, not only for the result of their willful acts, but also for an injury occasioned to another by the person's want of ordinary care or skill in the management of their property or person, except so far as the latter has, willfully or by want of ordinary care, brought the injury upon themselves. (Civ. Code § 1714(a).)
- 2) Provides that no person who, in good faith, and not for compensation, renders emergency medical or nonmedical care at the scene of an emergency shall be liable for any civil damages resulting from any act or omission. The scene of an emergency shall not include emergency departments and other places where medical care is usually offered. This applies only to medical, law enforcement, and emergency personnel, as specified. (Health & Saf. Code § 1799.102(a).)
- 3) Extends to all other persons not covered by the above who are rendering medical or nonmedical care or other assistance in such situations immunity from civil damages resulting from any act or omission other than acts or omissions constituting gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct. (Health & Saf. Code § 1799.102(b).)
- 4) Authorizes an emergency responder, notwithstanding the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act, to provide basic first aid to dogs and cats to the extent that the provision of that care is not prohibited by the responder's employer. Civil liability for a person who provides care to a pet or other domesticated animal during an emergency is governed by the following:
 - a) Section 4826.1 of the Business and Professions Code governs care provided by a veterinarian.
 - b) Subdivision (a) of Section 1799.102 of the Health and Safety Code governs care provided by an emergency responder, or law enforcement and emergency personnel specified in this chapter.
 - c) Subdivision (b) of Section 1799.102 of the Health and Safety Code governs care provided by any person other than an individual described above. (Health & Saf. Code § 1799.109.)
- 5) Defines "search and rescue dog" as a dog that is officially affiliated with, or sponsored by, a governmental agency and that has been trained and approved as a search and rescue dog, or that is currently registered and approved for search and rescue work with a search and rescue team affiliated with the California Emergency Management Agency. The term also includes a dog that is in training to become registered and approved for that work. (Civ. Code § 54.25(b)(4).)

This bill:

- 1) Authorizes a person licensed to operate an ambulance or a person who operates ambulances owned or operated by a fire department of a federally recognized Indian tribe to transport a police canine or a search and rescue dog that is injured in the line of duty to a veterinary clinic or similar facility if there is no other person requiring medical attention or transport at that time. To the extent feasible, the handler of the police canine or search and rescue dog shall accompany the animal during transport to maintain control of the animal during transport.
- 2) Authorizes, notwithstanding Section 4825 of the Business and Professions Code, an emergency responder to provide basic first aid to a police canine or search and rescue dog that is injured in the line of duty while the police canine or search and rescue dog is being transported to a veterinary clinic or similar facility.
- 3) Provides that an emergency responder who acts in good faith and not for compensation to provide basic first aid to an injured police canine or search and rescue dog while the police canine or search and rescue dog is being transported to a veterinary clinic or similar facility is not subject to criminal or civil liability for any injury to the canine that occurs during the emergency transportation or administration of medical care described herein.
- 4) Provides that this immunity does not apply if the act or omission by an emergency responder constitutes gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct.
- 5) Clarifies that an emergency responder who provides the first aid described above does not render the transportation or care "for compensation" for the purpose of this section, notwithstanding their receipt of compensation for other services as a result of their employment.
- 6) Clarifies that it does not require an ambulance to transport, or an emergency responder to provide first aid to, a police canine or search and rescue dog. A contract for the provision of emergency medical response or transport shall not contain, as a condition of award, a requirement to provide care or transport to police canines or search and rescue dogs.
- 7) Requires an ambulance operator that elects to provide transport to police canines or search and rescue dogs to develop policies regarding the transport of canines, including, but not limited to, what additional equipment should be carried by the ambulance and any necessary decontamination procedures following the transport of the animal before returning the ambulance to human patient use. The policies shall be submitted to, and approved by, the local emergency medical

services agency. This provision does not apply to ambulances owned or operated by a fire department of a federally recognized Indian tribe.

- 8) Defines “police canine” as a canine that is owned, or the service of which is employed, by a state or local law enforcement agency, a correctional agency, a fire department, a special fire district, or the State Fire Marshal for the principal purpose of aiding in the detection of criminal activity, flammable materials, or missing persons, the enforcement of laws, the investigation of fires, or the apprehension of offenders.
- 9) Makes clarifying changes to the statute authorizing and providing qualified immunity to those rendering care to pets during an emergency.

COMMENTS

1. Civil liability and immunity

As a general rule, California law provides that persons are responsible, not only for the result of their willful acts, but also for an injury occasioned to another by their want of ordinary care or skill in the management of their property or person, except so far as the latter has, willfully or by want of ordinary care, brought the injury upon themselves. (Civ. Code § 1714(a).) Liability has the primary effect of ensuring that some measure of recourse exists for those persons injured by the negligent or willful acts of others; the risk of that liability has the primary effect of ensuring parties act reasonably to avoid harm to those to whom they owe a duty.

Conversely, immunity from liability disincentivizes careful planning and acting on the part of individuals and entities. When one enjoys immunity from civil liability, they are relieved of the responsibility to act with due regard and an appropriate level of care in the conduct of their activities. Immunity provisions are also disfavored because they, by their nature, preclude parties from recovering when they are injured, and force injured parties to absorb losses for which they are not responsible. Liability acts not only to allow a victim to be made whole, but to encourage appropriate compliance with legal requirements.

Although immunity provisions are rarely preferable, the Legislature has, in limited scenarios, approved measured immunity from liability (as opposed to blanket immunities) to promote other policy goals that could benefit the public. Immunities are generally afforded when needed to ensure the willingness of individuals to continue taking on certain roles that may involve some risk and to incentivize certain conduct, such as the provision of life-saving or other critical services. Examples include protections for use of CPR (Civ. Code § 1714.2); use of an automated external defibrillator (Civ. Code § 1714.21); providing emergency care at the scene of an emergency (Health & Saf. Code §§ 1799.102, 1799.106); and performing emergency

rescue services (Health & Saf. Code § 1799.107). However, as indicated above, rarely is immunity absolute, and these immunities generally do not cover grossly negligent conduct or intentional misconduct.

2. Emergency care for police canines and search and rescue dogs

According to the author:

Police canines are far more than working animals – they are loyal and courageous partners in law enforcement who play a critical role in safeguarding our communities, apprehending violent suspects, detecting narcotics, and protecting officers in the field. These expertly trained dogs face many of the same risks as their human counterparts, yet when they are seriously injured in the line of duty, the care they receive is often delayed or denied due to outdated and inconsistent laws. Currently, policies governing the treatment and transport of injured police canines vary by county, and only licensed veterinarians are authorized to provide care – leaving emergency medical personnel unable to act due to legal and liability concerns. This gap in law has real consequences. In Los Angeles, three K-9s were recently wounded during a violent standoff and required immediate emergency care. In Vacaville, a police dog was shot while engaging an armed suspect. In both cases, critical care was delayed. These animals are not disposable – they are trusted members of law enforcement teams who deserve the same urgency of care as any first responder. This bill establishes a statewide standard to authorize EMS personnel to administer emergency medical care and transport injured police canines to a veterinary facility when no human patients require transport. It also protects EMS personnel from civil or criminal liability when providing this care. This reform ensures that these brave animals receive the life-saving treatment they need and rightfully deserve.

This bill responds to these incidents and concerns by authorizing ambulances to transport these dogs when injured in the line of duty. The bill provides a series of conditions on this right, including that no person requires medical attention or transport at that time and the ambulance operator has developed and submitted policies regarding such transport, except as specified.

Emergency responders are authorized to provide basic first aid to the injured dogs during this transport to a veterinary clinic or similar facility. They are immune from liability for any injury caused to such dogs during the transportation and administration of care. However, such immunity does not extend to acts or omissions that constitute gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct.

This follows a similar authorization in SB 1305 (Glazer, Ch. 900, Stats. 2018), which provided authorization and qualified immunity for providing first aid to cats and dogs.

The California Professional Firefighters write in support:

Specially trained canines operate in important support roles for all types of public safety, whether as dedicated canine law enforcement officers or as search and rescue canines working beside emergency response personnel. These dogs undergo significant training and provide assistance across a wide variety of scenarios, protecting personnel, tracking suspects, and locating victims of emergencies that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to find in a chaotic situation. This work is often dangerous, and canines can suffer a variety of injuries in the line of duty.

AB 463 allows emergency medical personnel to both provide emergency care to an injured police or search and rescue canine, as well as to transport the canine to a veterinary provider in order to receive more extensive care. These canines are important partners in the provision of public safety, and this measure will ensure that they receive the timely, live-saving care they need when they suffer injuries in the line of duty.

SUPPORT

California Professional Firefighters
California Veterinary Medical Association

OPPOSITION

None received

RELATED LEGISLATION

Pending Legislation:

SB 466 (Caballero, 2025) provides total immunity from liability to a public water system in a civil case brought by non-governmental entities or individuals harmed by the water system's acts or failure to act related to hexavalent chromium in drinking water during specified time periods. SB 466 is currently in the Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee.

AB 365 (Schiavo, 2025) requires specified utilities to have an automated external defibrillator (AED) available for emergency use at each worksite, as provided, and provides qualified immunity for acquiring and using such AEDs in emergency

situations. AB 365 is currently in this Committee and is being heard the same day as this bill.

AB 369 (Michelle Rodriguez, 2025) provides qualified immunity to those administering, in good faith, anti-seizure rescue medication at the scene of an emergency, as provided. AB 369 is currently on the Senate Floor.

AB 1172 (Nguyen, 2025) authorizes individuals with developmental disabilities to receive emergency seizure medication by creating a training pathway for employees of licensed facilities that choose to volunteer to administer the medication. It provides qualified immunity to volunteers who so administer the medication. AB 1172 is currently in the Senate Human Services Committee.

Prior Legislation:

SB 1305 (Glazer, Ch. 900, Stats. 2018) *See* Executive Summary.

AB 1776 (Steinorth, Ch. 272, Stats. 2018) permitted the County of San Bernardino to conduct a three-year pilot project that would authorize emergency transportation in an ambulance for a police dog injured in the line of duty to a veterinary medicine facility under certain conditions, including if there is not a person requiring medical attention or medical transportation at the time the request is made to transport the police dog, and the dog's canine handler accompanies the injured dog and is the one responsible for any first aid rendered to the dog during transport.

PRIOR VOTES:

Senate Health Committee (Ayes 9, Noes 0)

Assembly Floor (Ayes 69, Noes 0)

Assembly Appropriations Committee (Ayes 15, Noes 0)

Assembly Health Committee (Ayes 16, Noes 0)
