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HOUSE BILL DRH40187-CCa-1A

Short Title: Vet Care for Retired First Responder Dogs. (Public)

Sponsors: Representative Gillespie.

Referred to:

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO REIMBURSE OWNERS OF RETIRED FIRST RESPONDER CANINES FOR
VETERINARY CARE.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Chapter 143 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new
Article to read:

"Article 12L.

"Retired First Responder Canine Veterinary Care Reimbursements.

"§ 143-166.90. Purpose.

In consideration of hazardous public service rendered to the people of this State, there is
provided a system of veterinary care reimbursement for retired first responder canines.

"§ 143-166.91. Definitions.

The following definitions apply in this Article:

- (1) Correctional agency. – A lawfully established State or local public agency
having primary responsibility for the supervision, protection, care, custody,
control, or investigation of individuals at a State prison or local confinement
facility within the State.
- (2) Covered first responder unit. – Any correctional agency, fire department, or
law enforcement agency.
- (3) Fire department. – A lawfully established State or local public agency having
primary responsibility for firefighting and fire prevention.
- (4) Law enforcement agency. – A lawfully established State or local public
agency within the State having primary responsibility for the prevention and
detection of crime or the enforcement of penal, traffic, highway, regulatory,
game, immigration, postal, customs, or controlled substance laws.
- (5) Retired first responder canine. – A canine meeting the following criteria:
 - a. The canine retired on or after July 1, 2024, and prior to retirement was
owned by a covered first responder unit for the principal purpose of
aiding in the detection of criminal activity; the enforcement of laws;
the apprehension of offenders; the detection of accelerants, explosives,
or narcotics; or search and rescue operations.
 - b. The canine received certification in obedience, apprehension,
explosives detection, accelerants detection, narcotics detection, or
search and rescue work from a nationally recognized organization that
certifies canines performing that type of work.



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(6) Veterinary care. – The practice, by a veterinarian, of veterinary medicine as defined in G.S. 90-181. For purposes of this Article, this term includes, at a minimum, each of the following:

- a. Annual wellness examinations.
- b. Vaccinations.
- c. Internal and external parasite prevention treatments.
- d. Testing and treatment of illnesses and diseases.
- e. Medications.
- f. Emergency care and surgeries.
- g. Veterinary oncology or other specialty care.
- h. Euthanasia.
- i. Cremation.

"§ 143-166.92. Registration of a retired first responder canine with the Department of Public Safety.

(a) In order for a retired first responder canine to be eligible to participate in this program, upon the retirement of a first responder canine, the covered first responder unit shall register the canine with the Department of Public Safety. Registration of the retired first responder canine shall require the following information from the covered first responder unit:

- (1) Verification that the canine was owned by the covered first responder unit for the principal purpose of aiding in the detection of criminal activity; the enforcement of laws; the apprehension of offenders; the detection of accelerants, explosives, or narcotics; or search and rescue operations.
- (2) The date the canine retired from service with the covered first responder unit.
- (3) The name, breed, and age of the canine.

(b) Upon receipt of all information required in subsection (a) of this section, the Department shall issue to the covered first responder unit a certification that the canine has been registered as a retired first responder canine for purposes of this Article.

(c) The covered first responder unit shall provide a copy of the retired first responder certification to the canine's new owner.

"§ 143-166.93. Registration of a retired first responder canine owner with the Department of Public Safety.

(a) An owner of a retired first responder canine who seeks reimbursement for veterinary care of the canine shall register with the Department of Public Safety. Registration of the owner shall require the following information from the owner:

- (1) Name, telephone number, and mailing address of the owner.
- (2) Proof of ownership of the retired first responder canine.
- (3) A copy of the retired first responder canine certification from the covered first responder unit from which the canine retired.

(b) The owner shall be responsible for notifying the Department of any changes to the information required for registration pursuant to subsection (a) of this section.

(c) Upon receipt of all information required in subsection (a) of this section, the Department shall register the owner as the approved Fund recipient for any eligible reimbursements paid for the retired first responder canine's veterinary care.

"§ 143-166.94. Application for reimbursement.

(a) When a retired first responder canine receives veterinary care, the registered owner of the canine may apply to the Department of Public Safety pursuant to the provisions of this Article for the reimbursement of that care up to the amount of one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500) in a State fiscal year.

(b) When seeking reimbursement in accordance with the provisions of this Article, the registered owner of the retired first responder canine must submit an application for

1 reimbursement within 90 days of the date of the veterinary care received by the retired first
2 responder canine.

3 (c) The application for reimbursement shall be submitted on a form created by the
4 Department which shall, at a minimum, require the following information:

5 (1) The name of the registered owner.

6 (2) An itemized statement from the veterinarian that includes all of the following
7 information for veterinary care services provided to the retired first responder
8 canine:

9 a. The name, telephone number, and mailing address of the veterinarian.

10 b. The name of the retired first responder canine that received veterinary
11 care from the veterinarian.

12 c. The date the retired first responder canine received veterinary care
13 from the veterinarian.

14 d. The specific veterinary care services provided.

15 e. The cost of each veterinary care service provided.

16 f. Confirmation that the registered owner paid for the veterinary care
17 services.

18 (3) Any additional information required by the Department to verify the
19 authenticity of the veterinary care services or costs submitted by the registered
20 owner in the application for reimbursement.

21 (d) The Department may deny an application for reimbursement under any of the
22 following circumstances:

23 (1) The canine that received veterinary care is not a registered first responder
24 canine pursuant to G.S. 143-166.92.

25 (2) The owner has not registered with the Department pursuant to
26 G.S. 143-166.93.

27 (3) The registered owner's application for reimbursement does not contain all
28 required information set forth in G.S. 143-166.94.

29 (4) The application for reimbursement contains inaccurate or materially false
30 information.

31 (5) The registered owner has already received the maximum reimbursement
32 amount for the retired first responder canine for the State fiscal year.

33 (6) The funds allocated for this program have been exhausted for the fiscal year.

34 **"§ 143-166.95. Creation of Fund; management.**

35 There is established within the Department of Public Safety the Retired First Responder
36 Canine Fund. All monies in the Fund shall not revert. Awards from the Fund shall be distributed
37 in accordance with this Article.

38 The Department of Public Safety shall have the power to adopt rules for the administration
39 of the provisions of this Article and shall have the authority to use up to one percent (1%) of
40 monies received by the Retired First Responder Canine Fund for the purpose of administering
41 the Fund. The Department of Public Safety shall be vested with the power to make all
42 determinations necessary for the administration of this Article and all of its decisions and
43 determinations shall be final and conclusive and not subject to review or reversal.

44 **"§ 143-166.96. Record keeping.**

45 In relation to applications received under this Article, the Department of Public Safety shall
46 keep a record of the following:

47 (1) All applications received.

48 (2) All application determinations.

49 (3) All funds disbursed.

50 **"§ 143-166.97. Names of owners of retired first responder canines not a public record.**

1 Except as otherwise provided in this section, the name, address, and telephone number of the
2 registered owner of the retired first responder canine is confidential and shall not be considered
3 a public record as that term is defined in G.S. 132-1. Nothing in this section prohibits the
4 Department of Public Safety from sharing any information directly necessary for the
5 administration of the Fund.

6 **"§ 143-166.98. Other benefits not affected; elective participation.**

7 (a) No other benefits now provided for retired first responder canines shall be affected
8 by the provisions of this Article, and the benefits provided for in this Article shall not be
9 diminished, abated, or otherwise affected by the provision of benefits to retired first responder
10 canines under any other provision of law.

11 (b) Owners of retired first responder canines are not required to seek reimbursement for
12 veterinary care under this Article, and the failure to seek that reimbursement in a given year shall
13 not preclude an owner from seeking future reimbursement under this Article."

14 **SECTION 2.** G.S. 17F-21 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

15 "(c) The terms and conditions outlined in the transfer of ownership of a service dog, as
16 referenced in subsection (a) of this section, shall not prevent the owner of a retired first responder
17 canine from applying for reimbursement of veterinary care for a retired first responder canine in
18 accordance with Article 12I of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes."

19 **SECTION 3.** G.S. 150B-1(d) reads as rewritten:

20 "(d) Exemptions from Rule Making. – Article 2A of this Chapter does not apply to the
21 following:

22 ...

23 (35) The Department of Public Safety with respect to administering the Retired
24 First Responder Canine Fund under Article 12I of Chapter 143 of the General
25 Statutes."

26 **SECTION 4.** G.S. 150B-1(e) reads as rewritten:

27 "(e) Exemptions From Contested Case Provisions. – The contested case provisions of this
28 Chapter apply to all agencies and all proceedings not expressly exempted from the Chapter. The
29 contested case provisions of this Chapter do not apply to the following:

30 ...

31 (30) The Department of Public Safety with respect to any decision necessary to
32 administer the Retired First Responder Canine Fund under Article 12I of
33 Chapter 143 of the General Statutes."

34 **SECTION 5.** For purposes of satisfying the eligibility requirements established in
35 G.S. 143-166.92, as enacted by Section 1 of this act, a first responder unit may register with the
36 Department of Public Safety a first responder canine that retired on or after July 1, 2024.

37 **SECTION 6.** Notwithstanding G.S. 143C-5-2, there is appropriated from the
38 General Fund to the Retired First Responder Canine Fund the sum of four hundred thousand
39 dollars (\$400,000) in recurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to be used in accordance with
40 the provisions of Article 12I of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes, as enacted by this act.

41 **SECTION 7.** This act is effective 45 days after it becomes law.