

---

---

# AMANDA NEDWESKI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 32<sup>ND</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Testimony on Assembly Bill 61 - The K9 Riggs Act

March 5, 2025

Chairman Spiros and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety – thank you for holding public hearing on Assembly Bill 61, *The K9 Riggs Act*. This legislation increases the felony level penalty for injuring or killing a law enforcement or fire animal.

Last session, I had the honor of presenting Sergeant Terry Tift and K9 Riggs with the Assembly’s Hometown Hero award. In October of 2021, Sergeant Tift and Riggs responded to a high-risk call in our district involving a violent suspect on the run for homicides committed in the Chicago area. Riggs suffered a life threatening injury at the hands of that suspect but miraculously survived. We are thrilled to have Sergeant Tift and K9 Riggs here today to tell their heroic story.

This bill speaks directly to the hearts of our local law enforcement teams and the residents of Kenosha County. Positioned between Milwaukee and Chicago, our district faces unique challenges with increasing crime creeping into our communities from all directions. Situated directly in the crossfire between these high-crime cities, we rely heavily on our K9 cops and their loyal partners to protect us and, often, to chase and catch the bad guys passing through.

Law enforcement K9s and their handlers are uniquely skilled and qualified in keeping our communities safe. The highly specialized training and instincts of K9s and their police partners are essential to solving drug-related crimes, apprehending dangerous criminals, searching for missing persons, detecting explosives, and so much more. Law enforcement K9s often risk their lives in the line of duty, and AB 61 recognizes the danger these dogs face on a regular basis.

This legislation raises the penalties for intentionally harming law enforcement K9s, upgrading the offense from a Class I felony to a Class H felony. If that harm results in death, the penalty is upgraded from a Class H felony to a Class G felony. The Kenosha County Sheriff’s Department, the Kenosha Police Department, and the Kenosha County Board have all urged us to make this change to state law, and I am proud to stand with them in ensuring that K9s are treated with the respect and protection they so clearly deserve.

Assembly Bill 61 has already received bipartisan support in both the Assembly and the Senate. It has earned the backing of the Milwaukee Police Association, the Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association, the Wisconsin Professional Police Association, and the Fraternal Order of Police. I ask this committee to give its full support to AB 61 so we can pass this legislation that honors the dedication and sacrifice of the courageous four-legged heroes who serve alongside their human public safety partners every day.

# AMANDA NEDWESKI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 32<sup>ND</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## 2025 Assembly Bill 61

<b>Current</b> Harassment of police and fire animals <u>951.095</u>	<b>Current Penalties</b> <u>951.18(2m)</u>	<b>K9 Riggs Act</b>
Violates <u>951.095</u>	Class B forfeiture	Class B forfeiture
Violates 951.095 <u>intentionally or negligently</u> , knows is a police/fire animal	Class A misdemeanor	Class A misdemeanor
Violates 951.095 <u>intentionally</u> , knows is a police/fire animal, and causing injury to the animal	Class I felony <i>max \$10,000 / 3 years &amp; 6 months</i>	Bump up to Class H <i>max \$10,000 / 6 years</i>
Violates 951.095 <u>intentionally</u> , knows is a police/fire animal, and causes death to the animal	Class H felony <i>max \$10,000 / 6 years</i>	Bump up to Class G <i>max \$25,000 / 10 years</i>
	Court MAY order he criminal violator may not own, possess or train any animal or type or species of animal for a period specified by the court, but not to exceed 5 years. <u>951.18(4)(c)</u>  (additional items in (4)(a) and (4)(b))	Court MAY order he criminal violator may not own, possess or train any animal or type or species of animal for a period specified by the court, but not to exceed 5 years. <u>951.18(4)(c)</u>  (additional items in (4)(a) and (4)(b))



# Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

## Testimony on Assembly Bill 61

Thank you, committee members, for hearing Assembly Bill 61 today. This is a bill that is very dear to me as an animal lover. And I appreciate Representative Nedweski reaching out and working with me on this bill.

Simply put, this bill strengthens Wisconsin's animal abuse laws. Right now, the penalty for abusing a fire or police animal is a maximum of 1.5 years in prison with 2 years extended supervision. If the animal is killed that increases to 3 years in prison and 3 years extended supervision. I believe that is totally unacceptable.

You may have heard stories about notorious serial killers getting their start by harming animals as children. But these stories are more than just anecdotes. According to researchers at the FBI, there is a well-documented link with individuals who show violent behavior like abusing animals, and those who ultimately commit violence against humans. One 2017 study found that 75% of women that had been victims of domestic abuse reported their partner also threatened or intentionally harmed their companion animal.

Now, specific to fire and police animals. These animals are highly trained, invaluable members of the team. Like their human counterparts, they are brave, often going into harm's way, whether that's to save a person's life, stop a crime from occurring, or search and find a criminal. They are heroic. But, just like their human counterparts, they are also targets.

That is why they need extra legal protection. This bill will make the maximum penalty for abusing a fire or police animal 3 years in prison and 3 years extended supervision. If the animal is killed, 5 years in prison and 5 years extended supervision. And frankly, I don't know if that is enough, but it is better than the current law.

People that commit these crimes against innocent animals are cruel and depraved individuals. The evidence shows that people who harm animals are more likely to be violent towards humans too. This bill will both punish individuals and, hopefully, discourage future violent behavior.

Again, thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 61 and, I urge your support so that we can start holding serious animal abusers accountable for their actions.

And if anyone is wondering, I have authored other bills to increase penalties for harming all animals, not just police or fire animals, and am working on that again this session. Animal abuse is a serious crime and needs to be treated as such. This bill takes a step toward that.

---

Serving Racine and Kenosha Counties - Senate District 21

State Capitol, P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707-7882 • (608) 266-1832 • Toll-free (866) 615-7510  
E-Mail: [Sen.Wanggaard@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Sen.Wanggaard@legis.wi.gov) • [SenatorWanggaard.com](http://SenatorWanggaard.com)



March 5, 2025

To: Chairman Spiros and Members of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

From: Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association

Re: Support Assembly Bill 61, Injury or Death of a Police or Fire Canine

---

Chairman Spiros, thank you for your willingness to hold a hearing on this legislation. We would also like to thank the authors, Representative Nedweski and Senator Wanggaard for introducing this bill.

We urge support of Assembly Bill 61.

Under current law, any person who intentionally injures a police dog may be charged with a Class I felony, and anyone who intentionally causes the death of a police dog may be charged with a Class H felony.

Assembly Bill 61 increases the penalty for injuring a police dog to a Class H felony and those who intentionally kill a police dog may be charged with a Class G felony. A Class H felony is punishable by a fine of up to \$10,000 or up to six years in prison, or both, and a Class G felony is punishable by a fine of up to \$25,000 or prison for up to 10 years, or both.

Police canines are an integral part of any law enforcement team, and like other police officers, they risk their lives in the line of duty. By increasing the penalty for those who hurt or kill a police dog, it demonstrates to those who would do this act, that their criminal actions against a police canine, should, and will, have serious repercussions.

The Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association constantly look at ways to help ensure that our communities are safe. Police canines are a very valuable resource to achieve this goal.

The Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association support this legislation and ask that the committee move forward on this legislation.

We would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this legislation.



# KENOSHA COUNTY District Attorney

**Xavier Solis**

District Attorney

**Andrew J. Burgoyne**

Deputy District Attorney

**Heather M. Beasy**

Victim Witness Coordinator

**Tina A. Burke**

Office Manager

**Brian P. Stuht**

Office Investigator

912 56th Street

Molinaro Building

Kenosha, WI 53140

Phone 262-653-2400

Victim Witness 262-653-2408

Fax: 262-653-2783 – 2nd Floor

Fax: 262-653-2411 – 3rd Floor, West

Fax: 262-653-2487 – 3rd Floor, East

*For Official Use*

March 3, 2025

Dear State Legislature of the Great State of Wisconsin:

As the District Attorney for Kenosha County, I am writing to express my strong support for enhanced penalties for those who harm or kill police K9s. K9s are indispensable members of law enforcement. The recent injury of K9 Riggs serves as a sobering reminder of the invaluable and dangerous role K9s play in supporting law enforcement efforts to protect and serve our community.

K9 Riggs, like all police K9s, is a highly trained officer dedicated to the safety and security of Kenosha County residents. K9s are an essential component of our law enforcement strategy. They perform dangerous and complex tasks, from apprehending suspects to detecting drugs and explosives, all while putting their own safety at risk to safeguard the public. The recent injury sustained by Riggs was not only a personal tragedy for our community, but also an affront to the rule of law and underscores the critical importance of this legislation. Our office is committed to prosecuting criminals who harm or endanger police K9s, recognizing the vital role they play in protecting our officers and our community.

Increased penalties for harming K9s would ensure that individuals who attack these courageous animals face appropriate, serious legal consequences. It is imperative that we send a clear message that attacks on law enforcement — in any form — will not be tolerated. This law would protect our K9s and reinforce the commitment we have to law and order within our community.

I respectfully urge you to support harsher penalties and stand with law enforcement, which will provide the necessary legal framework to safeguard K9 officers like Riggs and further ensure that our law enforcement professionals have the tools and protections they need to carry out their duties effectively. Stronger penalties will not only help protect our K9

officers, but also send a clear message that we uphold the Rule of Law in Kenosha County and beyond.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to your support in strengthening the legal protections for our K9 officers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

District Attorney for Kenosha County