



Charlottesville–UVA–Albemarle Emergency Communications Center

ECC Facility Therapy Dog Program

Policy Number: 2.2 Adopted: [x/x/2026](#) Executive Director:

I. PURPOSE

This policy establishes guidelines for the Emergency Communications Center's (ECC) *Facility Therapy Dog* that resides on-site. The goal is to ensure the dog's use supports the agency's mission while maintaining a safe, inclusive, and compliant work environment that protects coworkers' rights under applicable federal and Virginia law. Therapy dogs assist in reducing stress, anxiety, and emotional trauma for individuals affected by cumulative stress and vicarious trauma.

II. SCOPE

This policy applies to all coworkers, contractors, and visitors who enter the facility.

III. DEFINITIONS

FACILITY THERAPY DOG

A professionally trained dog that is owned by the agency and lives on-site to support therapeutic, emotional, educational, safety, and operational functions. The dog will have completed an American Kennel Club Therapy Dog certification program from a recognized organization. The dog is not a service animal as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

DESIGNATED HANDLER(S)

A coworker responsible for the dog's daily management. One coworker from the admin team and one coworker from each shift may apply to serve as Designated Handlers. Designated Handlers will receive training in handling the Facility Therapy Dog from K9s for Warriors. Follow-up training for the dog and handlers will be provided by K9s for Warriors on an as needed or as requested basis. Assignment as a Handler will follow all guidelines contained in the Career Development policy. No employee may serve as a Handler until such time that all required training is completed.

BACKUP HANDLER(S)

Trained individual(s) who assume responsibility when the designated handlers are unavailable. One coworker from the admin team and one coworker from each shift may volunteer to serve as Backup Handlers.

SUPERVISOR(S)

A direct supervisor on each shift will be trained at the same level as the Backup Handler. A Supervisor will be assigned on each shift.

FACILITY THERAPY DOG'S DESIGNATED AREA (DESIGNATED AREA)

Facility Therapy Dog's Designated Area (Designated Area): An area of the ECC set aside for the Facility Therapy Dog where the dog will have access to a space to rest, a water bowl, a food bowl, and a kennel

IV. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

DESIGNATED HANDLER:

- Receives training on canine care and behavior.

- Provides day-to-day care, feeding, grooming, enrichment activities, and behavior monitoring.
- Ensures the Facility Therapy Dog is under control at all times (leash, harness, or voice control as appropriate). The Facility Therapy Dog will be on a leash at all times when outside the ECC facility.
- Maintains a clean environment and addresses any sanitation issues promptly.
- Ensures the Facility Therapy Dog receives routine veterinary care, vaccinations, and documentation. The Primary Designated Handler will be responsible for transporting the Facility Therapy Dog to and from any veterinary appointments, unless that responsibility is delegated to a Backup Handler or Supervisor.
- Ensures the Facility Therapy Dog receives routine grooming consistent with the schedule recommended by the dog's veterinarian.
- Ensures the Facility Therapy Dog receives at least two (2) thirty (30) minute walks per day.
- Ensure the Facility Therapy Dog receives regular restroom breaks.
- Provide as much advanced notice as possible to Backup Handlers and Supervisors in the event that the Designated Handler will be out on leave and/or otherwise unable to fulfill their duties.
- The compensability of Handler activities will follow Albemarle County's Classification and Compensation and Pay Administration policies as well as the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

BACKUP HANDLERS & SUPERVISORS:

- Receive training equivalent to the Primary Handler.
- Assume the duties of the Primary Handler during the Primary Handler's absence or unavailability.
- When the Designated Handler is engaged in essential duties of their position (such as actively handling a call for services) at a time when the Facility Therapy Dog requires a walk or care, the Backup Handler or Supervisor on that shift will assume responsibility.

FACILITY ADMINISTRATION:

- Maintains the Facility Therapy Dog's care budget (food, grooming, veterinary services).
- Ensures compliance with this policy and timely responds to coworker concerns.
- There will be a dedicated space for the dog for its own downtime and rest. The handler(s) or caretaker(s) may direct the dog to its space as needed.
- Since the dog's primary place of residence will be the ECC, the handler(s) and caretaker(s) are responsible for coordinating at least two (2) thirty (30) minute walks per day. These should occur outside, weather permitting. Dog walking time is typically considered compensable when performed by on-duty employees.
- The dog should not leave the ECC building without being on a leash.

V. COWORKER CONCERNS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

The agency recognizes that coworkers may have sensitivities, allergies, phobias, cultural or religious concerns, or health related limitations related to the Facility Therapy Dog.

The ECC will treat all concerns seriously and will provide reasonable adjustments, including, but not limited to:

- Modified workspaces away from the Facility Therapy Dog's primary areas
- Alternative walking routes within the building
- Adjusted schedules for times when the Facility Therapy Dog is present in common areas
- Air purifiers or other environmental measures
- Having the Facility Therapy Dog return to his Designated Area

Requests will be handled confidentially through the ECC's Human Resources Manager. No coworkers will be required to interact with or care for the Facility Therapy Dog unless interaction is an explicit part of their job duties.

VI. LOCATIONS AND ACCESS

The Facility Therapy Dog is permitted in all areas of the ECC facility. Coworkers may request that the Facility Therapy Dog leave a specific area and/or return to his/her Designated Area at any time.

VII. BEHAVIORAL STANDARDS

Facility Therapy Dog will:

- Have completed the therapy dog training program at K9s for Warriors
- Remain under control of a trained handler
- Exhibit non-aggressive behavior
- Be clean, groomed, and free of parasites
- Demonstrate appropriate obedience and task-specific behaviors
- Consistently wear a collar with identification tags and dog license issued by the County of Albemarle

Aggressive behavior, repeated barking, jumping, or disruption may result in temporary removal from the facility pending evaluation.

Coworkers will:

- Interact with the Facility Therapy Dog only when the handler grants permission
- Interact with the Facility Therapy Dog only when the dog is not performing a designated task
- Interact with the Facility Therapy Dog only when the coworker's job duties allow
- Respect posted signage regarding the Facility Therapy Dog's status (working/resting/not to be disturbed)

Coworkers will not:

- Feed the Facility Therapy Dog, without the preapproval of the handler; this expressly includes treats
- Give the Facility Therapy Dog toys, without the preapproval of the handler
- Give commands unless trained and authorized

VIII. HEALTH, SAFETY, AND SANITATION

- The handler is responsible for timely waste disposal and maintaining sanitary conditions.
- The Facility Therapy Dog's sleeping/rest area must be cleaned weekly. The Primary Handler is responsible for ensuring completion of weekly cleaning, which may be delegated to Backup Handlers or Supervisors according to a posted schedule.
- Employees should report safety or hygiene concerns to the ECC's Human Resources Manager or a Supervisor.
- Supervisors are responsible for reporting safety or hygiene concerns to the Operations Manager.

IX. COMPLAINTS OR POLICY VIOLATIONS

- Concerns related to the Facility Therapy Dog should be reported to the ECC's Human Resources Manager.
- Investigations will follow Albemarle County Human Resources policies for workplace concerns and will be processed as promptly as may be operationally feasible.
- Corrective measures may range from adjustments to handler practices to reassessment of the dog's suitability for residence at the facility.

- Retaliation for making a complaint or raising concerns under this policy is strictly prohibited.

X. TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Coworkers will receive periodic information about:

- The Facility Therapy Dog's purpose and role
- Proper interaction protocols
- Allergy and sensitivity accommodation procedures
- Whom to contact with concerns

Handlers will receive periodic retraining to ensure the handler's competency in managing the dog effectively in various environments and scenarios. Handlers, including Backup Handlers and Supervisors, are responsible for documenting any behavioral incidents or escalating stress behaviors. All such documentation will be maintained by the Operations Manager.

The Facility Therapy Dog will receive periodic retraining to ensure the dog's behavior and therapeutic response continue to support the ECC's operations.

XI. PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS OR INTERACTIONS

Public demonstrations involving the Facility Therapy Dog must be approved in writing by a Deputy Director, or Executive Director. The Facility Therapy Dog will not attend public demonstrations without an assigned Handler present. The Facility Therapy Dog must meet grooming and behavioral standards before attending external events.

XII. REMOVAL FOR HEALTH OR BEHAVIORAL REASONS

In the event that the Facility Therapy Dog exhibits any behavioral issues, the dog will be removed from the ECC and remain in the care of a Designated Handler. K9s for Warriors, or an equivalent organization, will be contacted to provide a behavioral assessment and provide a recommendation on next steps. If the organization determines the behavior can be corrected with training, the organization will provide the training and follow up assessments once the therapy dog is reintegrated in the ECC. If the organization determines the behaviors cannot be satisfactorily corrected and the dog is not a good fit for the ECC, they will facilitate alternate placement for the dog.

MEDICAL AND END OF LIFE CARE

The therapy dog's welfare will be prioritized over program participation. In the event of a medical issue, the Designated Handler will seek veterinary care. The Executive Director must approve any treatments or procedures recommended by the veterinarian. The therapy dog may be removed from the ECC and remain in the care of the Designated Handler to allow for healing and recovery. The therapy dog will return to the ECC and resume program activities as recommended by the veterinarian.

The ECC supports humane and compassionate end-of-life planning. As the therapy dog ages, or in the event of a progressive condition, the Designated Handler will work with the veterinarian to assess and prioritize the dog's quality of life and establish a care plan. Once a terminal prognosis is determined, the facility dog will enter palliative and hospice care. Humane euthanasia may be considered when a veterinarian advises pain, distress, or loss of function can no longer be adequately managed. The Executive Director will be the authorized decision maker for end-of-life care under veterinary advisement.

XIII. REVIEW AND UPDATES

This policy will be reviewed at least annually or upon changes to federal or Virginia law, workplace needs, or veterinary guidance. Amendments may be implemented as necessary to maintain safety, equity, and operational effectiveness. Handlers, Backup Handlers, Supervisors, and Human Resources will contribute input for the annual review.