

# New England State Legislative Issues December 2020

**Connecticut** – A Police Transparency and Accountability Taskforce has been gathering public input before issuing recommendations for law enforcement reforms. AKC GR testified that standards of accountability for law enforcement misconduct should include municipal animal control officers since they are identified as law enforcement personnel. Submitted testimony requested the taskforce review and include animal control officers, including agents appointed as humane society employees, in their misconduct oversight and disciplinary recommendations to the legislature. The taskforce is looking to issue recommendations for short term objectives in December and for more comprehensive changes in 2021.

**Massachusetts** – The House and Senate introduced bills that would ban or severely limit the use of police K-9s and mischaracterize how working police K-9s are utilized. AKC GR hosted a program for Massachusetts lawmakers with two expert K-9 police handlers on the value of purpose-bred working dogs, and police K-9 certifications, policies and procedures. This resulted in acceptable K-9 text in the Senate's final bill, [SB 2820](#). The House version differed greatly, but the conference committee released a 129-page bill that preserved the continued appropriate use of these working dogs. After sending the bill to the Governor for approval, Governor Baker returned the bill to the Legislature with requested changes that are now under consideration. In addition, the Massachusetts Attorney General finalized an investigation of a county correctional facility concluding that detainees' civil rights were violated as a result of the illegal use of K9s among other breaches of policy. A letter is now being drafted for legislators by AKC GR to highlight the procedures in place, if adhered to, would not have resulted in these harmful consequences.

**Massachusetts** – Two pet retail ban bills – [HB 800](#) and [SB 175](#) – were re-drafted by the Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure. The re-draft, [SB 2592](#) does not ban pet stores from selling dogs or cats. Instead, it establishes health certificate requirements, consumer protections and standards for all animal transfers whether made by a pet store, animal shelter, rescue or breeder. AKC GR is generally pleased with [SB 2592](#) and will advocate for clarifying amendments.

**Massachusetts** – [SB 2158](#) would create a civil infraction for presenting a pet dog as a service dog and authorize the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to prepare and make available to businesses upon request: (i) a decal suitable for posting in a front window or door stating that service dogs are welcome and that misrepresentation of a service dog is a violation of Massachusetts law; and (ii) a brochure detailing permissible questions a business owner may ask to determine whether a dog is a service dog, acceptable answers to those questions, and guidelines defining unacceptable behavior. It was favorably reported from the Joint Federal Affairs

Committee on April 21, 2020 and sent to Senate Ways and Means for consideration. AKC GR supports this bill.

**New Hampshire** – Governor Sununu convened a Law Enforcement Accountability, Community and Transparency Commission in June to review oversight, training standards and make recommendations for change. AKC GR testified regarding the need to hold animal control officers accountable to the same standard and discipline for law enforcement misconduct; such as making unsubstantiated charges and acting in bad faith. The AKC GR recommendation was included in the [Taskforce's Final Report](#) of Recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

**Rhode Island** – The Senate Commission on Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights continues to meet and review the system of disciplinary review and law enforcement reform measures being considered by other states. A survey of law enforcement department disciplinary actions over the past five years has been distributed and tallied. AKC GR is virtually attending the Commission's meetings to monitor for any legislative recommendations impacting police K-9s.

**Vermont** – The House Agriculture Committee introduced [HB 940](#) establishing animal cruelty investigation, training and certification for animal control officers and it was placed on the House calendar for action in March. In June, the bill was recommitted to the committee for additional changes. AKC GR has concerns that the draft eliminates the need for humane officers to be appointed by employing humane societies incorporated in Vermont and fails to specify the limits of officers' authority. AKC GR will continue to work closely with the Federation on recommending bill text to the committee before the bill is re-filed.

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