HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Police Animals Petition

Thank you for contacting me about police animals.

Police support animals make a valuable contribution in the detection and prevention of crime and in maintaining public safety. I am extremely grateful for the bravery and skill shown by police dogs and their handlers on a daily basis. Attacks of any sort on police dogs or horses are unacceptable and should be dealt with severely under the criminal law.

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 an attack on a police dog or other police support animal can be treated as causing unnecessary suffering to an animal, and the maximum penalty is 6 months' imprisonment, an unlimited fine, or both. Indeed the financial element of the penalty was raised in 2015 from a maximum fine of £20,000. Similarly an attack on a police animal could be considered by the court as an aggravating factor leading to a higher sentence. Under some circumstances assaults on support animals could be treated as criminal damage which would allow for penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment.

The Government has also requested that the Sentencing Council considers assaults on police animals as an aggravating factor as a part of their current review on guidelines for sentencing in the Magistrates' Courts, which includes animal cruelty offences.

While the current penalties are appropriate, I agree that it is unpalatable to think of police animals as merely 'equipment' as the charge of criminal damage might suggest, and does not convey the respect and gratitude felt for the animals involved and their contribution to law enforcement and public safety. Work across Government is underway to explore whether there is more that the law should do to offer the most appropriate protections to police animals and all working animals.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Timpson

Edward Timpson MP

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