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JANUARY 5, 2026

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**ILETSB and the Cook County Sheriff's Office Announce Nation's First Law Enforcement Crisis Response Therapy Canine Certification Program**

**Springfield, IL** – The Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board is excited to announce, in partnership with the Cook County Sheriff's Office (CCSO), a first-of-its-kind law enforcement therapy canine certification framework. This new certification is designed to formally review and certify law enforcement personnel and their trained therapy canines for use in crisis calls, peer support, and community engagement functions.

This three-day certification course includes classroom instruction, field training, scenario-based exercises, and a final team assessment for law enforcement therapy dog teams. The curriculum integrates core Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) principles, co-response concepts, peer support strategies, and advanced handling techniques to ensure that certified law enforcement therapy canine teams are prepared to respond appropriately to individuals experiencing trauma or crisis, while maintaining the safety and well-being of both the public and the canine.

Teams completing this program will be integrated into the ILETSB mutual aid deployment system, allowing them to be mobilized to areas of need during large-scale crises. Initial program participants have been deployed to schools in Chatham, Harvey, Summit, and Chicago in Illinois, as well as locations in Colorado following tragic events.

"I am extremely proud of the ILETSB team for expanding on the success of our training and services to build this new program that will allow police officers to better respond to those in crisis throughout Illinois," said **Sean Smoot, Chairman of the Board at ILETSB**.

The course was developed in close partnership with the Cook County Sheriff's Office's Tails of Redemption program. Tails of Redemption is a nationally recognized initiative that combines canine rehabilitation with law enforcement training. The program offers opportunities for individuals in Cook County Jail custody to train rescued canines in basic obedience. In select cases, certain canines are further prepared for therapy work with law enforcement agencies.

"Rehabilitation is at the heart of Tails of Redemption," said **Cook County Sheriff Thomas J. Dart**. "The men in this program learn so much about how they are capable of making positive



difference for the dogs in their care. Our therapy dog training builds on these efforts, because now they are helping law enforcement support our communities in times of need.”

ILETSB staff worked collaboratively with TOR leadership and subject-matter experts to develop a certification model that reflects best practices, operational realities, and public expectations.

Illinois is nationally recognized for its leadership in CIT, and with the passage of **Public Act 104-106**, ILETSB now has clear statutory authority to establish clear standards for therapy canine teams operating in law enforcement environments.

“As the use of therapy canines within law enforcement continues to grow, we saw an opportunity to make sure they were adhering to specific standards while allowing the officers greater opportunities for their use,” said **Jennifer Wooldridge, ILETSB Deputy Director of Operations, State CIT coordinator, and Handler of Therapy K-9 Trooper.**

Illinois’ CIT program—approaching its 25th anniversary—remains a cornerstone of this initiative. The therapy canine certification builds directly upon CIT’s emphasis on de-escalation, communication, and trauma-informed response, ensuring that canine teams complement, rather than replace, established crisis response practices.

This certification framework marks the beginning of a broader, phased effort by ILETSB and CCSO to formalize and expand law enforcement therapy canine standards statewide. As policies, partnerships, and implementation processes continue to be developed, the Board’s goal is to support a fully operational certification program by summer 2026, with ongoing evaluation and refinement to ensure program integrity and effectiveness.

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## **About ILETSB**

*The Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board is the state agency mandated to promote and maintain a high level of professional standards for law enforcement, correctional, and court security officers. Its purpose is to promote and protect citizen health, safety, and welfare by assisting municipalities, counties, special districts, universities, colleges, and other local governmental agencies of this state in their efforts to upgrade and maintain a high level of training and standards for law enforcement personnel.*