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April 22, 2026

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Inaugural Cohort Graduates from Nation's First Crisis Response Therapy Canine Program

Graduation marks major milestone in innovative, trauma-informed approach to public safety

Chicago, IL — Today, the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board (ILETSB), in partnership with the Cook County Sheriff's Office (CCSO), marked a historic milestone with the graduation of the inaugural cohort of the nation's first Crisis Response Therapy Canine Certification Program. The inaugural class features 11 certified therapy canine teams representing seven agencies across Illinois.

The program, launched to better equip law enforcement agencies with tools to respond to individuals in crisis, provides specialized training for therapy canine teams to support de-escalation, mental health response, and trauma-informed policing. Today's graduates represent a new model for public safety that prioritizes compassion, connection, and community trust.

"This inaugural graduating class represents a meaningful step forward in how we approach public safety," **said Sean Smoot, Chairman of the Board at ILETSB.** "ILETSB introduced Trooper, its first therapy dog supporting officer mental health resiliency, as an initial step, and this program builds on that work by integrating certified therapy canine teams into crisis response. We are giving officers and communities new tools to safely and effectively support individuals experiencing mental health challenges."

The certification program is the first of its kind in the United States, establishing standardized training and operational guidelines for therapy canines working alongside law enforcement. Participants completed rigorous instruction focused on crisis intervention, behavioral health awareness, and canine-handler coordination in high-stress environments.

Today's graduates will return to their respective agencies prepared to deploy therapy canine teams in a range of situations, including mental health calls, community engagement, and post-trauma response.

(more)



The inaugural graduating class of Crisis Response Therapy Canine Program includes the following certified teams:

Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board (ILETSB)

- Deputy Director Jennifer Wooldridge and K9 Trooper

Cook County Sheriff's Office

- Director Jerry Roman and K9 Zilly
- Jacquelyn Hedderman and K9 Winston
- Edgar Ortiz Antunez and K9 Buddy
- Veronica Grigorio and K9 Petals

Central Illinois Police Training Center, (MTU 7)

- Brian Fengel and K9 Ghost

Kendall County

- Stewart Blouin and K9 Snow

Orland Park Police Department

- Gordon Przislicki and K9 Holly

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Police Department

- Lorenzo Curtis Schwartzkopf and K9 Chase
- Tyson Wagner and K9 Max

Worth Police Department

- Mike Cozzi and K9 Louie

“My Office has worked to address mental health challenges in our communities, from providing Crisis Intervention Training for all Cook County Sheriff's officers to establishing a virtual co-responder program,” **said Cook County Sheriff Thomas J. Dart.** “So, we are incredibly proud to have ILETSB partner with us in creating this first of its kind crisis response training for therapy K9s. These certified teams will only enhance law enforcement response to mental health calls.”



The Crisis Response Therapy Canine Certification Program is part of ongoing efforts by ILETSB and CCSO to expand innovative, evidence-based approaches to public safety and strengthen trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

For more information about the program, visit [here](#).