



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senate approves 'Mitchell's Law': O'Mara co-sponsors legislation to strengthen protections for K-9 officers

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 19, 2017

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Albany, N.Y., May 18—The New York State Senate has approved legislation co-sponsored by Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) making it a felony to injure a K-9 officer in the line of duty.

The legislation (**S961/A6737**) is known as “Mitchell’s Law” in honor of city of Jamestown Police Department K-9 Officer Mitchell, a six-year-old German shepherd who has been a member of the department since 2011. Mitchell received life-threatening injuries during a confrontation with a suspected murderer following a six-hour standoff with police in November 2016.

In the aftermath of last fall’s incident, Jamestown Police Chief Harry Snellings and Mitchell’s handler, Officer Eric Kraft, contacted Western New York Senator Cathy Young (R,C,I-57th District) to request that she sponsor legislation increasing the criminal penalty for injuring a K-9 officer in the line of duty from the current misdemeanor to a felony.

O’Mara said, “K-9 officers across the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier regions, and throughout New York State, deserve this recognition and protection. These officers perform incredible service in assisting our law enforcement agencies catch criminals, locate missing persons, and search for drugs and explosives. These amazing police work dogs, as well as police work horses, have earned and deserve this action to protect their safety.”

The legislation has gained widespread support from law enforcement and animal advocacy groups, including the New York State Police Investigators Association, New York State Sheriffs’ Association, New York State Association of Chiefs of Police, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Humane Society of the United States, and the New York State Animal Protection Federation.

New York State Police Investigators Association President Christopher Quick said, “Having been a K-9 handler for eight years while in uniform as a Trooper, I know firsthand how important a K-9 is to his partner, law enforcement and particularly the handler’s family. Anyone who owns or has owned a pet will tell you how they are a part of a family. There is an exorbitant amount of time, money and dedication put forward to train a dog in becoming

a K-9. K-9s are sensitive and emotional creatures that communicate in various ways with humans, to simply treat them as an expendable tool that is easily replaced, is not right. I fully support raising the felony level to protect our partners that fight crime.”