

## Canine Handlers

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Dear Reader:

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We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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## Canine Handlers

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Many police departments have drug dogs, bomb dogs, or general patrol dogs. The officers assigned to handle these dogs usually care for the animals at their homes and sometimes train the dogs outside their normal work schedules. This constitutes time worked, and the time must be compensated. The employer cannot allow the employee to volunteer to care for the animal. Wage and Hour Opinion Letters, Dec. 30, 1985, June 13, 1989, and Aug. 11, 1993.

Since the employee is caring for the animal at home, there is no way to monitor the time an employee actually spends caring for the animal. Monitoring can be accomplished by establishing a policy dictating how much time the employee will spend each day caring for the animal. Courts have held that 30 minutes a day can be an adequate amount of time to care for the animal, but the employer should establish what it deems as a reasonable amount of time. If the handler also trains the animal outside the regular work schedule, this time should be built into the policy.

Of course, any unexpected time, such as emergency visits to a veterinarian, should be counted as additional time worked.

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