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Illinois Spotlights Groundbreaking Therapy K-9 Program at International Conference, Featuring Cook County Sheriff's Tails of Redemption *Innovating Crisis Intervention Training One Paw at a Time*

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Illinois showcased its efforts in combining therapy K-9s with crisis response at the 2025 CIT International Conference, held Aug. 11-13 at the Anaheim, California Marriott. Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board (ILETSB) State Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Coordinator **Jennifer Wooldridge** and Chief Legal Counsel **John Keigher** presented alongside therapy **K-9 Trooper**, highlighting the state's innovative "**See Spot Serve: Incorporating Therapy K-9s in Crisis Response Programming & Deployment**" session.

Trooper, a 3-year-old Border Collie mix who came from the Cook County Sheriff's Office's renowned Tails of Redemption program, impressed attendees with his comforting presence. His participation highlighted the vital role therapy K-9s play in de-escalating high-stress situations and providing comfort. "See Spot Serve" detailed how Illinois has launched a specialized certification program for CIT officers and co-responders who use therapy dogs, a program developed to ensure statewide standards for training and deployment.

This initiative received official approval with the signing of Senate Bill 1491 into law by Gov. JB Pritzker on Aug. 8, 2025. Sponsored by Sen. Mary Edly-Allen, SB1491 granted ILETSB to develop a comprehensive course and certification program for law enforcement officers working with therapy dogs in crisis and emergency response.

"This is a significant moment for communities across Illinois," said **Wooldridge**, who also serves as Trooper's K-9 handler from the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board. "Now more than ever, our communities need this support. The ability for people to express their grief and relieve their stress in the presence of these wonderful K-9s is truly impactful."

"The new certification program will provide a vital framework for effective regional aid during crises," said **Keigher**. "This systematic approach ensures that our therapy K-9 teams are not only exceptionally trained but also readily available to support communities and first responders across Illinois."

The Tails of Redemption program, established by the Cook County Sheriff's Office, has played a crucial role in the development of Illinois' therapy K-9 initiative. Individuals in custody who participate in this program provide basic obedience training to rescue dogs that eventually become Therapy K-9s. This all-encompassing program is beneficial in many ways, as it not only aids in the rehabilitation of the individuals in custody but also prepares the dogs for their future roles. By providing trained therapy K-9s for crisis response, the program has forged vital partnerships across the state. The program's impact is exemplified by K-9 Ghost, a lab mix



therapy dog trained through Tails of Redemption, who now serves Mobile Training Unit 7 and offers comfort and support to the Peoria area and its surrounding communities. Tails of Redemption has facilitated over 170 adoptions to date.

Following the vehicle crash at the YNOT After School Camp in Chatham on April 28, 2025, highlighted the incredible impact of Illinois' therapy K-9 program in supporting Chatham during challenging times. In the aftermath, a dedicated team of therapy K-9s and their handlers swiftly answered the call to provide comfort to impacted children, community members, and strained first responders. This critical support included K-9 Trooper and Wooldridge, along with:

- K-9 Zilly & Bolt — Cook County Sheriff's Office "Tails of Redemption"
- K-9 Selena — Troy Police Department
- K-9 Lollipop — University of Illinois Police
- K-9 Snow — Kendall County Sheriff's Office
- K-9 Chase — SIUE Police Department
- Puppies Bean & Nugget — Waggin' Tails Animal Shelter/Cicero Animal Control

“Providing public safety is more than answering emergency calls, it is also comforting our communities during a crisis,” Cook County Sheriff Thomas J. Dart said. “I am especially proud of Tails of Redemption’s role in helping our local law enforcement agencies support the residents they serve.”

In 2018, Sheriff Tom Dart launched this innovative program uniting dogs, individuals in custody, and members of the community in a powerful journey of rehabilitation and hope. Participants not only learn to train dogs in basic obedience, and preparing the animals for adoption, but they also acquire essential life skills such as patience, compassion, and problem-solving, thus enhancing their job readiness upon release.

Beyond the therapy K-9 presentation, the Illinois delegation, including Wooldridge, Keigher, and Regional Coordinators John Williams and Mark Benson, also highlighted Illinois’ robust advanced and refresher CIT courses. Jerry Roman from the Cook County Sheriff's Office and therapy K9 Zilly, along with Curtis Schwartzkopf from the SIUE Police Department and K-9 handler of Chase, discussed the many benefits of therapy K-9s and their effectiveness in various settings.

Their presentations highlighted ILETSB’s dedication to participating in conferences, stakeholder meetings, and instructor retreats, emphasizing Illinois’ leadership in CIT programming compared to other states.

During breaks, Trooper, Zilly, and Chase were popular attractions, frequently stopped by attendees eager to interact and experience their calming presence.

Several other state affiliates voiced keen interest in Illinois' innovative programs, particularly the therapy K-9 certification, requesting additional information on how to implement similar initiatives.



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.