



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

## New York State Senate Passes “Mitchell’s Law”

CATHARINE YOUNG June 19, 2018

| ISSUE: MITCHELL'S LAW, K-9 OFFICERS, LAW ENFORCEMENT, CRIME AND CORRECTION



ALBANY – For the second year in a row, the New York State Senate has passed legislation making it a felony to injure a K-9 officer in the line of duty.

Senate Bill 961, known as Mitchell’s Law, is named for the Jamestown Police Department’s K-9 Officer Mitchell, who was seriously injured apprehending a murder suspect in late November 2016. A German Shepherd who began his tenure with the Jamestown Police Department in 2011, Mitchell was grievously injured during a confrontation with suspected murderer Keith Robbins following a six-hour standoff. During the apprehension of Robbins,

K-9 Officer Mitchell was stabbed in the throat and under his jaw, causing the knife to penetrate his tongue, resulting in emergency surgery for his injuries.

Under current law, suspects can only be charged with a Class E felony for intentionally killing a police work dog or police work horse while such animal is performing its duties and under the supervision of a police officer. Because the wounds suffered by K-9 Officer Mitchell did not result in his death, Robbins could only be charged with a misdemeanor. In response to the incident, Senator Young introduced legislation that would make it a felony to injure a K-9 officer in the line of duty.

“K-9 Officer Mitchell’s story is a reminder of the critical role that all K-9 officers occupy within our law enforcement community. They are an integral part of law enforcement’s mission to serve and protect and their lives and safety are often at risk, as Mitchell’s was on the day he helped facilitate the capture of convicted murderer Keith Robbins,” said Senator Young. “Stabbed by the perpetrator, Mitchell’s injuries were life-threatening and required emergency surgery. While, thankfully, he recovered from his injuries, his case highlighted the need for tougher penalties for those who injure these valuable K-9 officers.”

“After several years of dedicated and excellent contributions to the Jamestown Police Department and the community, Mitchell will be retiring from service in early 2019. I urge the Assembly to join the Senate in passing this critical measure before the session ends so that we can achieve this important goal before Mitchell’s service ends. The lives of all of our state’s K-9 officers are important and irreplaceable and our law needs to reflect that,” said Senator Young.

“We are pleased to hear that Mitchell’s Law has been passed in the New York State Senate. I hope that the Assembly will recognize the importance of working animals in law enforcement and support this much needed change in the current legislation. I would like to

thank Senator Young for her support and efforts in moving Mitchell's Law forward," said Chief of Police Harry Snellings.

"K-9 Mitchell has been an integral and heroic member of the Jamestown Police Department for seven years. In that time, he has helped us locate drugs, conduct building searches, track dangerous perpetrators and much more. Police work carries inherent risks for all our members including our K-9 officers. However, on November 15, 2016, Officer K-9 Mitchell, in the course of doing his job, nearly lost his life at the hands of murderer Keith Robbins. His actions helped protect the lives and safety of four officers, including me, and we will be forever grateful he was there that day," said Officer Erik Kraft.

"With Mitchell set to retire in early 2019, I would like to see Mitchell's Law succeed for him and all the K-9's that have been seriously injured while performing their duties. In my conversations with other law enforcement departments in this region and beyond, there is unanimous agreement that Mitchell's Law should be enacted, in recognition of the critical nature of the work conducted by our K-9's. I hope the members of the Assembly will act on this legislation before the end of the 2018 legislative session," he concluded.

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