



WASHOE COUNTY

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STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: April 14, 2026

DATE: March 26, 2025

TO: Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Kate Thomas, Washoe County Manager
Patricia Hurley, Chief Human Resources Officer

SUBJECT: Recommendation to approve the Washoe County Dogs in the Workplace Policy which establishes comprehensive guidelines and standards for allowing qualifying dogs in County workplaces where practicable, extending the known benefits of dogs to employees while maintaining high service levels, safety standards, and professional work environments. The policy applies to employees who own certified therapy dogs or qualified public service dogs from recognized organizations, emphasizing responsible pet ownership, safety protocols, and the privilege-based nature of participation in this program. Human Resources/County Manager's Office. (All Commission Districts.) **FOR POSSIBLE ACTION**

SUMMARY

Staff requests that the Board of County Commissioners approve the attached Washoe County Dogs in the Workplace Policy. This comprehensive policy establishes standards and procedures for allowing certain qualifying dogs in County workplaces to support and promote employee wellness, work-life balance, and public service initiatives. Research demonstrates that employees working around dogs may experience significant benefits including reduced stress, enhanced relaxation, improved performance, more positive social interactions, increased communications with coworkers, and better overall mood. Additionally, allowing certain dogs in the workplace serves multiple strategic purposes: maintaining healthy work-life balance, serving as a recruiting and retention tool, encouraging active breaks rather than sedentary ones, reducing absenteeism, increasing productivity, improving citizens' perception of the County, and enhancing employee morale.

The policy also supports employees participating in qualified public service programs, such as Liberty Dogs, that benefit United States Veterans by fostering service dogs and puppies. This aligns with Washoe County's commitment to community service and supporting our veteran population.

AGENDA ITEM # _____

This policy is not intended to replace or conflict with the accommodation of Service Animals as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). ADA service animals used by employees with disabilities are permitted in the workplace as a reasonable modification under federal law, and no vest, certification, registration, third-party insurance, or department head approval may be required for an ADA service animal.

Washoe County Strategic Objective supported by this item: Innovative Services, Stewardship of our Community

PREVIOUS ACTION

No previous action related to this specific policy.

BACKGROUND

The Dogs in the Workplace Policy was developed in recognition of the growing body of evidence supporting the positive impacts that dogs can have in professional environments. Numerous studies have documented benefits including stress reduction, improved workplace morale, enhanced social interactions among staff, and support for healthy work-life balance initiatives. Additionally, employees may be working with a qualified public service organization (e.g. Liberty Dogs) to benefit United States Veterans by fostering a dog/puppy and this policy intends to allow for that public service.

Upon Board approval, the policy would become effective April 14, 2026. Departments would immediately begin accepting applications from interested employees, processing requests in coordination with the Animal Services and Human Resources Departments.

The policy framework was designed with several critical priorities:

Employee Wellness and Work-Life Balance - The policy recognizes that allowing employees to bring qualifying dogs to work can significantly contribute to employee wellness programs. This initiative may help reduce absenteeism, as employees with pets may need fewer personal days to address pet care needs. Additionally, dogs encourage employees to take active breaks throughout the day rather than remaining sedentary, promoting physical health and mental wellbeing.

Public Service and Community Support - A key component of this policy is its accommodation of employees working with qualified public service organizations to foster service dogs for United States Veterans or other persons with disabilities. Organizations such as Liberty Dogs depend on community members to provide temporary homes and socialization for dogs in training. By allowing these foster arrangements to continue during work hours where appropriate, Washoe County directly supports vital services for veterans and persons with disabilities.

Recruitment and Retention - In an increasingly competitive employment market, innovative workplace policies that support employee quality of life serve as valuable recruitment and retention tools. This policy positions Washoe County as a forward-thinking employer that values employee wellbeing and work-life integration.

Safety and Professional Standards - While recognizing these benefits, the policy maintains rigorous standards to ensure that workplace safety, productivity, and professional service delivery are never compromised. The policy includes extensive eligibility requirements, behavioral standards, owner responsibilities, and safety protocols designed to protect all employees, visitors, and County operations.

The policy framework mirrors successful approaches used in other County initiatives that balance innovation with accountability, employee support with operational needs, and flexibility with clear standards.

Risk Management and Insurance Considerations – The policy is consistent with Washoe County's comprehensive risk management practices; this policy includes robust insurance requirements to protect County interests. The requirement for owners to maintain Therapy Dog Handler insurance with specific liability limits (\$1,000,000 per occurrence, \$2,000,000 general aggregate) and to name Washoe County as additional insured follows established County insurance protocols.

These insurance requirements ensure that in the event of any incident involving a participating dog, appropriate coverage exists to address potential claims without exposing County resources to unnecessary risk. This approach is consistent with County insurance practices documented in various service agreements and contracts.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no direct fiscal impact on Washoe County operations. All costs associated with participating in this program are borne by individual employees.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of County Commissioners approve the Washoe County Dogs in the Workplace Policy as presented. This policy establishes comprehensive guidelines allowing qualifying dogs in County workplaces where practicable, supporting employee wellness, work-life balance, and public service initiatives while maintaining rigorous safety standards, professional work environments, and management oversight. The policy balances innovation in workplace practices with accountability, employee support with operational requirements, and flexibility with clear behavioral and safety standards.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Should the Board agree with staff's recommendation, a possible motion would be: *"Move to approve the Washoe County Dogs in the Workplace Policy as presented, with an effective date of April 14, 2026."*