

March 31, 2021

Anthony Puckett
President
North Carolina Police Dog Association

Via e-mail: info@ncpdassociation.com

Dear Chief Puckett:

We hope this letter finds you well. I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to request that the North Carolina Police Dog Association revoke its certification of the Salisbury Police Department canine handler believed to be [REDACTED] who can be seen in a now-viral [video](#) hanging and punching K-9 officer Zuul. The video shows the handler lifting Zuul up off the ground by the leash, swinging the dog over his shoulder, hauling him in this "choke hold" for several feet, body slamming him against the side of a police vehicle, violently shoving him against and into the vehicle, and punching him with force. The public outrage regarding this incident has been profound and has spread far beyond North Carolina. The story has made national and international news, including in [The New York Times](#), [Newsweek](#), and the [Daily Mail](#).

The NCPDA's bylaws indicate that the agency's purpose is, in part, to "[i]ncrease and maintain the level of professionalism and integrity regarding the use of police dogs ... in North Carolina." The violent behavior that this handler directed toward Zuul demonstrated a shocking lack of professionalism and integrity. Even the witnesses—apparently fellow law-enforcement officers—knew that the handler's actions were wrong. Men inside another police vehicle with the camera that filmed the incident can be heard speaking in the video, and one says, "We're good—no witnesses," while the others discuss turning off their cameras.

Furthermore, the certification rules and requirements listed in the NCPDA's North Carolina Police Dog Performance Standard state that "at no time will the handler correct the K-9 in a cruel manner on the testing grounds or in the presence of an evaluator" and that this may be "grounds to forfeit certification." The rules also indicate that "conduct unbecoming an officer ... may result in forfeiture of certification." While the standards do not define "cruel manner," any decent person would agree that slamming a dog into a vehicle and punching him is cruel and certainly unbecoming an officer of the law. If such a vicious "correction" is unacceptable on the testing grounds, then surely, it is just as inexcusable in the field. Moreover, the handler does all of this to "correct" the undesired behavior (exiting the car) *after* Zuul has already obeyed his command to stop. This reflects a serious misunderstanding of basic dog behavior and training principles, as the officer essentially punished Zuul for complying—something that surely caused the dog extreme confusion and distress.

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

Washington

1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles

2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk

501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

Affiliates:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

As you know, the Scientific Working Group on Dog and Orthogonal Detector Guidelines (SWGDOG) has published guidelines for the selection of K-9 handlers, and the North Carolina Justice Academy refers to these guidelines in its K-9 Legal Issues course materials. Among the qualifications indicated as “necessary for success” for a canine handler is integrity. The guidelines further state that the “[c]andidate must possess uprightness of character and soundness of moral principle.” This individual’s violent and abusive behavior toward his loyal K-9 partner indicates a serious lack of judgment and decency—qualities that the public demands and K-9s deserve from their human partners in law enforcement.

We hope you will agree that this officer’s conduct is unacceptable. PETA respectfully asks that the NCPDA immediately and permanently revoke his handler’s certification.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for everything that you do to keep our communities safe. I look forward to hearing from you and can be reached at 757-962-8338 or DaphnaN@peta.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daphna Nachminovitch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Daphna Nachminovitch
Senior Vice President
Cruelty Investigations Department