

Citizenship

Can citizens change laws?

Downloadable Resource

Mrs White



Occupation:

Police Officer.

Issues fought for:

To protect service animals; Making sure that injuring or killing a service animal, such as a dog or horse, results in sufficient punishment.

Methods Used:

Research, online petition, emails, lobbying politicians, media interviews.

Motivation

Retired Police Dog Finn is a highly trained and decorated former police dog. He was repeatedly stabbed in the chest and head on 5th October 2016 during an attempted arrest. The injuries suffered by Finn were so severe that he required 4 hours of life saving surgery and 11 weeks of recovery.



With the commitment and dedication of his handler PC Dave Wardell, the veterinary team and the Wardell family, Finn was able to return to active duty before his planned retirement in March 2017. Had Finn not protected PC Wardell there is little doubt that he would at best have suffered a serious injury or, at worst, lost his life.

You may be surprised to learn that under UK law there were no specific offences for causing injury to a police animal whilst carrying out their duties. Attacks on police animals were happening regularly but very few were pursued through the Courts due to the lack of an appropriate offence. Whilst Finn's case is thankfully an extreme case, it is by no means unheard of.

FinnsLaw was started by a group of volunteers to change this. They said that police animals should be recognised for the vital role they fulfil. Part of that recognition should be the creation of a specific criminal offence for causing injury to them.



Progress made

As a direct result of campaigning, some progress was made towards the group's goal. March 2017 saw the introduction of new sentencing guidelines, which could be taken into effect if a police animal is injured whilst carrying out its duties. The new sentencing guidelines could only be taken into account as an aggravating factor when the Court considers a suitable sentence.

Police animals protect us in the name of the law.

Write to your MP

Supporters were encouraged to write letters to their own MPs to spread the word about the campaign. They needed MPs' support so that when the proposal for the law went to parliament, MPs would vote for it to help it's progress through each stage.

Online petition

An online petition was created to gather as much public support as possible. It reached 100,000 signatures in 11 days!



Lobbying MPs and spreading the word

PC Dave Wardell and his team of volunteers got the support of Oliver Heald MP. He persuaded the House of Commons to introduce a bill in December 2017.

In the spotlight

Finn and PC Wardell gathered a huge amount of support, and were featured in news stories all over the country.

Success!

They were thrilled to have the bill made into law on the 8th April 2019. You can see that it took two years to pass the bill through the parliament.

The future

Finn's law has been applied to animals in the past year. Recent protests have involved service animals - keep an eye on the news to see if Finn's Law - The Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019 is used.



Glossary:

Activist:

A person who campaigns to bring about political or social change.

Petition:

A written request for action, usually signed by many people.

ePetition:

An online version of a petition, which can be shared by many people.

Lobbying:

Trying to persuade a politician to do something.

Mobilise:

To gather together or rally people ready for action.

Pledge:

⁶A promise or guarantee.



Media:

Mass communication – television, radio, newspapers, the internet, etc.

Survey:

A series of questions devised to find out a person's opinion on an issue.

Democracy:

A democracy means rule by the people. The name is used for different forms of government, where the people can take part in the decisions that affect the way their community is run.

Legislation:

A collection of laws in a country.

Campaign:

To work in an organized and active way towards a particular goal, typically a political or social one.

(This case study is based on the story of Finn's Law)

