



PITT COUNTY **SHERIFF**

**Sheriff
Paula Dance**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULY 21, 2026

****Every person accused of a crime is considered innocent until proven guilty in court.***

TRAGIC LOSS OF K-9 CHILLI

RELEASE: 2026-0062

Pitt County, N.C. - On June 11, 2026, a hot car incident resulted in the heartbreaking loss of our beloved working K-9, Chilli.

The deputy involved is a dedicated public servant who honorably served our country as an Army Ranger for four years before continuing his service to our community as a law enforcement officer. He is a husband, a father of young children, and an experienced K-9 handler who has served this agency for years with an exemplary record.

The deputy's dedication to his K-9 partners extends far beyond the line of duty. He and his family are devoted animal lovers who provide a caring home to three additional dogs and two cats.

Upon the retirement of Keno, his former K-9 partner, the deputy adopted him and gave him a loving home for the remainder of his life. Keno lived a full life before being succumbing to cancer.

On June 12, 2026, the Sheriff's Office initiated a comprehensive internal investigation. After reviewing the available evidence, the agency concluded that this was an accident.

The deputy and his family have been deeply affected by Chilli's death and continue to mourn this loss. Those who work with law enforcement K-9s understand these animals are far more than working partners, they become members of the handler's family. While we cannot comment on personnel matters, we can confirm that Pitt County provides Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counseling resources for employees who experience traumatic events.

Although no safety measure can eliminate every risk, this loss highlights the importance of modernizing our K-9 fleet. We will continue to advocate to the Board of Commissioners for funding to replace aging vehicles with purpose-built K-9 units that are equipped with safety features such as Hot-N-Pop systems, which monitor interior temperatures to help protect K-9s in emergency situations. While several handlers already have vehicles equipped with this technology, budget constraints have prevented us from outfitting every K-9 unit and unfortunately, the deputy partnered with Chilli did not have these advancements available. We remain committed to strengthening our equipment and resources to help prevent similar losses in the future.

Mailing Address:
Post Office Box 528
Greenville, N.C. 27858

Office: (252) 902-2800
www.PittCountySheriff.com

Street Address:
100 New Hope Rd.
Greenville, N.C. 27834

Media Contact: Lt. Lee Darnell at lee.darnell@pittcountync.gov