

Session:
Alaska State Capitol
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Alaska House of Representatives

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Proudly serving our friends and neighbors in the Abbott Loop - Lower Hillside Community

House Bill 70 – “Rico’s Law”

An act relating to emergency medical services for operational canines.

House Bill 70 empowers Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel to deliver on-scene point-of-injury (POI) emergency care and transport for operational canines (OpK9s).

Operational canines are essential members of law enforcement, other government operations, and search-and-rescue teams. These courageous animals amplify the success of countless military, law enforcement, search-and-rescue, and humanitarian missions. Their roles even extend to police or fire chaplaincy during crises.

This bill is named “Rico’s Law” in honor of Alaska State Trooper K9 Rico, whose end of watch occurred on March 26, 2017. Rico was fatally shot while heroically attempting to apprehend a suspect after a lengthy pursuit on the Parks Highway in Wasilla, Alaska.

K9 Rico, like all operational canines, demonstrated unwavering dedication, protecting, and defending his community. These animals are more than just assets or property—they are teammates, partners, and family members who deserve emergency care and transportation rights. Operational canines, especially those deployed in tactical or high-threat situations, face significant risks of injury or preventable death.

Currently, Alaska lacks statutory authority allowing EMS personnel to apply life-saving care to these animals. Under current law, providing such care could be deemed “practicing veterinary medicine without a license,” a violation under AS 08.98.120, carrying severe penalties. The super-rural nature of Alaska adds another dimension of acuity for our operational canines outside of Alaska’s major urban centers.

Alaska’s EMS professionals already possess the equipment, supplies, and medications needed to adapt existing prehospital standards of care for human patients to operational canines. Training programs like the K9 Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (K9 TECC) course provide additional training for clinicians to confidently manage operational canine emergencies. The passage of this bill would eliminate legal barriers, allowing EMS personnel to administer life-saving care and transport injured operational canines to emergency veterinary facilities.

With minimal investment by our participating EMS services, Alaska EMS can ensure that our operational canines have a fighting chance at survival when injured in the line of duty.