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Local PAWS Dog KOKO Named Semi-Finalist for National First Responder Therapy Dog Award

For more than 100 hours of support for Life EMS call center staff and paramedics

Grand Rapids, Michigan — KOKO, a Visiting PAWS dog with Paws With A Cause (PAWS), has been named a semi-finalist for FHE Health's 4th Annual First Responder Paws Therapy Dog Award, recognizing therapy dogs who make a meaningful difference in the lives of first responders.

KOKO regularly visits Life EMS through its "Kicking Back with KOKO" wellness program, where she provides comfort, connection and a little joy to the people behind the 911 calls. She has spent more than 100 hours visiting Life EMS staff, including both 911 call center employees and paramedics who respond to emergencies throughout the community.

"KOKO has a remarkable ability to walk into a room and make people smile," said Michele Suchovsky, CEO of Paws With A Cause. "She gives first responders something that can be hard to find during a busy or difficult day: a moment to pause, connect and simply enjoy being around a dog. We are incredibly proud of the impact she has made at Life EMS and thrilled to see her recognized for it."

KOKO's calm, affectionate personality makes her especially well-suited to working with first responders. Known for her love of holding hands and her ability to make people smile, she has become a familiar and much-loved presence at Life EMS. Her role even earned her an official Life EMS employee badge.

KOKO also visits EMT classes at Life EMS, where she provides students with a welcome break when the stress of training begins to build. Whether she is greeting staff, sitting beside someone who needs a quiet moment or simply soaking up attention, KOKO brings an easygoing presence to every visit.

Public voting for the First Responder Paws Therapy Dog Award is open October 5-19. Community members can read about the finalists and vote for KOKO at: www.fherehab.com/first-responder-paws-award

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About Paws With A Cause: Since 1979, Paws With A Cause (PAWS) has been transforming lives and strengthening communities through partnerships with custom-trained working dogs. PAWS assistance and facility dogs have helped thousands of people thrive, providing opportunities to live with independence, confidence, and companionship. Serving over 30 states across the country, PAWS is accredited by Assistance Dogs International and Animal Assisted Services International. To learn how you can get involved, please visit: pawswithacause.org