

NATIONAL SERVICE ANIMALS MONUMENT

NCMAC Testimony and Letters of Support

Submitted to the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

August 11, 2026

Submitted by Susan Bahary, Founder and Chair

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Oral Testimony – Susan Bahary
National Service Animals Monument
National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
August 11, 2026

Madam Chair and members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

The National Mall tells America's defining story. It is where our nation chooses the people, events, ideals, and sacrifices that deserve to be remembered for generations.

For more than 250 years, Americans have never stood alone. From the founding of our nation to the present day, service animals have carried soldiers into battle, delivered life-saving messages, detected danger before it struck, guided those without sight, searched for the missing, comforted the wounded, and protected our communities. Yet despite helping shape so many defining chapters of our nation's history, their story has never been permanently recognized on our nation's most important commemorative landscape.

That is why we are here today.

For more than thirty years, I have had the privilege of listening to the stories of veterans, handlers, first responders, guide dog users, assistance-animal recipients, medical professionals, researchers, historians, and families whose lives have been forever changed by these extraordinary partnerships. What began for me as a single sculpture commission involving the Marine war dogs of World War II became a journey through the course of American history.

One story changed my understanding in a lasting way. During the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the liberation of Guam, a Chamorro woman approached Dr. William Putney, who had commanded the Marine War Dog Platoons during World War II. She had never met him. She simply wanted to thank him because she knew the Marines—and their war dogs—had helped save her family.

Until then, much of my attention had been on those who served. Her gratitude helped me understand something larger: these partnerships also changed the lives of the people they protected and the communities they helped liberate. I stopped seeing this as one part of military history and began to understand it as part of America's history.

Ultimately, this is a story about America.

It is a story of courage shared, burdens carried together, lives saved, independence restored, hope renewed, and the extraordinary human-animal bond forged through service that has strengthened our nation from its founding to the present day.

Across generations of American history, a few names have come to symbolize countless others.

From the horses that carried George Washington and the Continental Army through the struggle for independence, these partnerships were present at the birth of our nation.

During the First World War, more than one million American horses and mules served overseas. They transported ammunition and supplies, moved artillery, and carried the wounded across terrain where machines often could not go. Their service was indispensable to the American war effort. Cher Ami, the carrier pigeon whose final flight helped save the Lost Battalion, reminds us that animals served in extraordinary ways beyond transport as well.

In 1928, Buddy, America's first Seeing Eye dog, helped open the door to greater independence, mobility, and opportunity for generations of Americans who are blind.

During World War II, Smoky served alongside American troops and later brought comfort to wounded service members during their recovery—an early and celebrated example of the healing role animals could play beyond the battlefield.

During the Korean War, the horse Sergeant Reckless carried ammunition through enemy fire to Marines on the front lines and brought wounded Marines to safety on her return trips, becoming a lasting symbol of courage and selfless service.

During the Vietnam War, military working dogs are widely credited with saving thousands of American lives through scouting, sentry, patrol, and detection work.

Over the past century, these partnerships have expanded dramatically—from guide and assistance animals providing independence to people with disabilities, to search-and-rescue dogs responding to national disasters, law enforcement K-9s protecting our communities, and animals now detecting disease and supporting veterans with invisible wounds.

Each represents countless others whose names history may never record, but whose service helped shape the nation we know today. This monument would honor these animals and the Americans who served beside them as handlers and partners, including those who gave their lives in that shared service.

Today, that same spirit of partnership continues through military working dogs, law enforcement K-9s, mounted police horses, guide and assistance animals, search-and-rescue teams, therapy animals, medical-detection dogs, and many others whose service continues to protect, heal, and enrich American lives every day.

The remarkable aspect of this history lies in both its breadth and its continuity. From the founding of the nation, through every generation since, and into the future, Americans have benefited—and will continue to benefit—from these partnerships. The values they embody—service, courage, sacrifice, loyalty, resilience, compassion, freedom, and independence—are among the very values commemorated throughout the National Mall.

The monument's significance stands on its own. Within the National Mall Reserve, visitors could understand this enduring national partnership in its full historical context. Its story reaches across war and sacrifice, freedom, public service, resilience, and independence—subjects central to the nation's principal commemorative landscape—yet the partnership itself has never been brought together and permanently recognized in a national monument.

The written testimony before you reinforces the breadth and national significance of this history. It brings together leaders of national museums and memorials, historians, researchers, veterans, military and law-enforcement handlers, guide- and assistance-dog organizations, search-and-rescue professionals, disability advocates, and families whose lives have been changed by these partnerships. They bring firsthand knowledge of service across war, public safety, disability assistance, disaster response, medicine, recovery, and remembrance, as well as the responsibility involved in commemorating nationally significant history in Washington. Collectively, their testimony documents this service from our country's founding to the present day.

Together, they show how deeply this history is embedded in the American experience.

The Reserve was established to protect what Congress described as a "substantially completed work of civic art." Its commemorative record contains no national monument dedicated to service shared by Americans and animals since our country's founding. An exception would address that omission while respecting the purpose and integrity of the Reserve.

We understand why exceptions to the Reserve must remain rare. We believe this is one of those rare cases because this history has extraordinary breadth, continuity, and national reach, with a clear historical and commemorative nexus to many of the people and events already commemorated there.

The Commission is being asked to advise Congress whether this history has the exceptional national significance that warrants an exception to the Commemorative Works Act and placement of the Monument within the National Mall Reserve.

If Congress subsequently authorizes that placement, we understand that the specific site will be determined through the established federal review process. We look forward to working with the appropriate agencies to identify the best location for the Monument within the Reserve.

We respectfully believe that this history meets the exceptional standard before you.

If the Commission agrees, we believe a location near the U.S. Park Police Horse Stables and Education Center offers a rare opportunity to connect that history with a continuing tradition of public service that visitors can still experience today.

In that setting, visitors can observe members of the U.S. Park Police Mounted Unit carrying out their daily responsibilities and, at times, members of the Park Police K-9 Unit as well. The monument and Park Police operations would have distinct purposes, and any relationship would be developed only in partnership with the appropriate agencies. But the proximity offers something unusual: a living connection between the history interpreted by the monument and a tradition of service that continues today.

As a sculptor, I know that a successful work should respond thoughtfully to its surroundings. Wherever its final home is established through the federal process, my hope is that this monument will feel meaningful, welcoming, and lasting without overwhelming the landscape.

The monument's public purpose would extend beyond remembrance. Service animals naturally engage children, opening a doorway to learning about American history, service, sacrifice, compassion, citizenship, and the responsibilities we share. Families, school groups, veterans, first responders, people with disabilities, and visitors of all ages could encounter these lessons together in a welcoming setting near the Stables.

Through on-site interpretation, a QR code, and the monument's website, visitors could explore the people, animals, events, and forms of service represented there—and continue that learning long after their visit.

I often imagine a family visiting the National Mall many years from now. A child may look up and say, "I never knew service animals and their handlers were such an important part of our history." And perhaps the parent will answer, "Neither did I."

That moment would mean the monument had fulfilled its purpose. It would have transformed recognition into understanding—revealing how this partnership has served the nation across its entire history and inspiring future generations to carry forward its values. A place within the National Mall Reserve would provide the context and permanence that purpose requires.

Madam Chair and members of the Commission, the National Mall tells America's defining story. The National Service Animals Monument reveals an enduring national partnership that has helped shape our country from its founding and continues to serve Americans today.

For more than 250 years, Americans have never stood alone.

Together, people and service animals have defended our freedom, protected our communities, guided those without sight, found the lost, comforted the suffering, advanced medicine, restored independence, and saved countless lives.

History remembers America's heroes. Today, we respectfully ask that it also remember the service animals who served beside so many of America's heroes and helped make their achievements possible.

It is time this partnership, spanning the life of our nation, received permanent national recognition within the National Mall Reserve.

Thank you for your consideration.



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Matthew Naylor

THE NATIONAL WWI MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL IS AMERICA'S LEADING INSTITUTION DEDICATED TO REMEMBERING, INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING THE GREAT WAR AND ITS ENDURING IMPACT ON THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY.

TESTIMONIAL FOR THE NATIONAL SERVICE ANIMALS MONUMENT

July 27, 2026

National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Room 220
Washington, DC 20242

Madam Chair and Members of the Commission:

I am pleased to provide written testimony regarding the National Service Animals Monument and the history it seeks to preserve and interpret. From the perspective of a public historian and the leader of an institution dedicated to preserving the history of World War I, I believe the service of animals alongside Americans represents a significant and too often underrecognized part of our national story.

World War I provides a particularly powerful example. Modern industrial warfare did not eliminate dependence upon animals. Horses and mules remained indispensable to the movement of artillery, ammunition, food, medical supplies, and wounded soldiers, including across terrain where mechanized vehicles could not effectively operate. Their contribution was not incidental to the war effort; animal transport was essential to sustaining military operations.

Animals also performed critical functions beyond transport. Carrier pigeons carried messages when telephone lines were destroyed or other communications were unavailable or unreliable. Cher Ami, remembered for carrying a message that helped save members of the Lost Battalion, has become one of the best-known examples of that service. Dogs also served in communications, sentry, detection, and other roles, while animals of many kinds provided companionship and morale amid the extraordinary physical and psychological strain of war.

These examples matter because they change how we understand history. The accomplishments we commemorate as human achievements were often made possible by partnerships between people and animals. To interpret the history accurately, we should recognize not only the individuals who served, but also the animals upon whom they depended for mobility, communication, protection, rescue, and support.

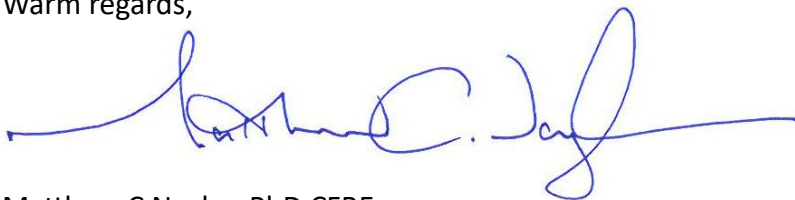
World War I is one chapter in a much longer American story. Across generations, the specific roles have evolved, but the underlying partnership has endured. Animals have served Americans in later conflicts, in law enforcement and public safety, in search and rescue and disaster response, and in guide, assistance, therapy, medical-detection, and other roles that protect lives and expand human independence.

This continuity is important. The National Service Animals Monument would not simply commemorate a collection of notable animals or isolated episodes. It would allow visitors to understand an enduring relationship that runs through more than two centuries of American history and intersects with many of the values already commemorated on the National Mall: service, courage, sacrifice, freedom, resilience, and compassion.

Our national commemorative landscape is strongest when it helps visitors see connections across American history. The National Service Animals Monument would not duplicate an existing memorial. It would provide a new interpretive lens through which visitors could better understand many chapters already represented in Washington, while bringing together a nationally significant history that has never received comprehensive permanent recognition of its own.

For these reasons, I believe the history represented by the National Service Animals Monument is of exceptional and enduring national significance and merits consideration for recognition within the National Mall Reserve.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matthew C. Naylor", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew C Naylor, PhD CFRE
President and CEO



Written Testimony — Toni Kiser
The National WWII Museum
Before the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

To the Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission:

The history of World War II cannot be fully understood without recognizing the many ways animals contributed to the work of American servicemembers. I am pleased to support the National Service Animals Monument and the permanent national recognition of this broader history.

During World War II, animals performed varied and consequential duties in support of American forces. Dogs served in sentry, messenger, scouting and other capacities; horses, mules and other animals supported operations and transportation; and pigeons contributed to communications. Their roles reflected both the military needs of the era and a longstanding human reliance upon animals in service.

These histories are compelling not simply because of what the animals accomplished, but because of what they reveal about the servicemembers who depended upon them. The bonds formed under difficult conditions speak to trust, responsibility, companionship, courage and sacrifice.

World War II represents one major chapter in a history stretching across the American experience. A National Service Animals Monument would connect that chapter to earlier and later generations and allow visitors to understand a form of service that cuts across traditional boundaries between individual wars and institutions.

In my view, this history is of exceptional and enduring national significance and merits consideration for recognition within the National Mall Reserve.

Respectfully submitted,

Toni M. Kiser
Senior Registrar & Director of Collections Management
Author, *Loyal Forces: American Animals in WWII*



GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

MEMORIAL FOUNDATION.

To the Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission:

As President and CEO of the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation, I have been entrusted with leading the sacred mission to build our Nation's memorial honoring all who served in the Global War on Terrorism.

That responsibility has continually reminded me that the story of American service is not carried by any one generation, military branch, profession, or form of sacrifice. It is a shared story, built upon the courage of those who answered our Nation's call and the families and communities who carried the weight of that service alongside them.

Military working animals and their handlers are an inseparable part of that story.

Throughout the Global War on Terrorism, military working dogs and their handlers detected explosives, located threats, protected our servicemembers, and entered dangerous places where their actions saved countless American lives. These teams served together, faced danger together, and, in some cases, made the ultimate sacrifice together.

As a combat veteran, I understand the bond that is formed among those who depend upon one another in the most difficult circumstances. The relationship between a handler and a military working animal is one of extraordinary trust, loyalty, and shared purpose. Their contributions are not secondary to our Nation's military history. They are part of the very fabric of it.

Our own work to develop the Global War on Terrorism Memorial has reinforced the importance of ensuring these stories are remembered. The service and sacrifice of military working animals and their handlers belong within the broader account of the millions of Americans who served during this more than two decade conflict.

The National Service Animals Monument would also recognize that this legacy of service extends beyond the battlefield. Service animals and their handlers have supported law enforcement, search and rescue operations, individuals with disabilities, and countless other missions that protect, assist, and strengthen the American people.

For generations, these remarkable partnerships have served our Nation with courage and distinction, yet there is no permanent national memorial dedicated to telling their collective story.

The National Mall is where America remembers. It is where we teach future generations about the people, sacrifices, and defining chapters that shaped our Nation. The service of these animals and their human partners is an overlooked chapter of American history that deserves to be preserved and understood.

I respectfully and wholeheartedly support the National Service Animals Monument and encourage the Commission to recognize that this important story of service, sacrifice, loyalty, and devotion merits commemoration within the National Mall Reserve.

Respectfully,

Michael "Rod" Rodríguez
President and CEO
GWOT Memorial Foundation



NATIONAL DESERT STORM
WAR MEMORIAL

1101 Connecticut Ave NW #450
Washington DC 20036

August 5, 2026

Dear Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission:

I am pleased to offer my support for the National Service Animals Monument and its request to be found eligible for placement within the National Mall Reserve.

Having been involved in establishing a national memorial, I appreciate the thoughtful responsibility entrusted to this Commission in determining which subjects merit inclusion within the National Mall Reserve. Those decisions help define the stories that future generations will encounter when they visit our nation's capital.

In my view, the story of America's service animals and their handlers is one of those subjects.

For generations, military working dogs, horses, and other service animals have served beside Americans in times of war and peace. They have protected lives, carried out dangerous missions, and faithfully supported those who serve our country. Their contributions have become part of our nation's history, yet they have never received permanent national recognition.

I believe the National Service Animals Monument honors a legacy worthy of inclusion within the Reserve, and I respectfully encourage the Commission to find it eligible for placement there.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Cee Freeman

Vice President

National Desert Storm War Memorial Association



NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MEMORIAL FUND

MEMORIAL | MUSEUM | OFFICER SAFETY & WELLNESS

Dear Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission,

I am a retired law enforcement officer and now humbly serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, steward of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. Today, however, I write to you simply as an American who is fortunate enough to call these United States home.

I feel an obligation to lend my voice in support of the National Service Animals Monument organization and its effort to recognize and honor a unique and compelling part of our continuing American story.

Working with and through the National Park Service has given me a deep appreciation for the role our national memorials play. They do far more than honor the past—they preserve the stories which define who we are as a nation and ensure those stories are passed on to future generations.

Over time, the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission has appropriately recommended and supported the establishment of new memorials recognizing people and chapters of American history whose lasting significance became clearer with the passage of time. In my view, the story of America's service animals and the people who serve alongside them is one of those chapters.

For more than two centuries, military working animals, law enforcement partners, search-and-rescue teams, assistance animals, and countless other service animals have faithfully served our nation. Alongside their handlers, they have saved lives, protected our communities, supported our military and law enforcement officers, and responded during our country's most challenging moments. Their service reflects the very best of America—courage, sacrifice, loyalty, and an unwavering commitment to others.

As someone who plays a small part in preserving our nation's history through memorialization, I believe the long and distinguished history of service animals has earned a place among those remembered within the National Mall Reserve. Recognizing these extraordinary partnerships—and the often-unbreakable bonds forged between animals and their handlers—would not only honor their service, but would also help ensure that future generations understand the profound impact they have had on our nation's history and on the lives of countless Americans.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this important proposal.

Respectfully,

William Alexander
Chief Executive Officer
National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund



To the Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission:

As a curator devoted to preserving and interpreting the history of the dog and the human-canine relationship, I am pleased to support the National Service Animals Monument.

Working dogs have occupied an extraordinary place in American history. Across generations, dogs have served Americans in military operations, law enforcement, search and rescue, disaster response, guide and assistance work, detection and other forms of service. The specific jobs have evolved, but the underlying relationship—built upon training, communication and extraordinary mutual trust—has endured.

This history also reveals something larger about American society. As scientific understanding and training advanced, people discovered new ways in which the capabilities of dogs could protect lives, increase independence and serve communities. The resulting history encompasses both nationally significant events and the daily service that has transformed individual lives.

At the American Kennel Club Museum of the Dog, we honor famed military service dogs with the permanent display sculptures of “Stubby” (WWI), Smoky (WWII) and a casting of “Always Faithful” the Doberman that serves as the sentinel atop the nation’s first war dog memorial in Guam. The museum also maintains an extensive archive of servicemen’s first-hand recollections of their heroic dogs from WWI to the present day. Additionally, we highlight the AKC’s role in obedience training that began in the 1930’s and their handlers who played a critical part in preparing dogs for service both at home and abroad during the second world war.

Not being confined to military service dogs, the museum also employs an interactive display “Dogs on the Job” that highlights the seemingly limitless variety of crucial roles service dogs now play in in our daily life. It has been said that the only limit to a dog’s ability is our imagination to create a job for them to do.

A national monument can bring these separate chapters together and allow the public to see them as a distinctive part of our nation’s cultural and historical heritage. The National Service Animals Monument would provide that missing interpretive connection and permanently recognize a history that has touched military service, public safety and civilian life.

At the AKC Museum of the Dog, we do our part to extol the virtues of our canine companions. Based on the breadth, continuity and historical significance of the contributions of service animals throughout our country’s history, I believe this subject has the exceptional national significance required for placement within the National Mall Reserve. The Reserve would provide the strongest national setting in which visitors could understand this long and continuing history of service. I respectfully ask the Commission to recommend the National Service Animals Monument for placement within the Reserve.

Sincerely,

Alan Fausel

Curator

The AKC Museum of the Dog



7/31/2026

National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
Attention: Commission Members
National Park Service, National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive SW
Washington, DC 20242

Subject: Support for the National Service Animals Monument within the National Mall Reserve

To the Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission,

My name is Philip Weitlauf, and I am the Founder of the Michigan War Dog Memorial. In this role, I have had the distinct privilege of helping preserve the memory of our nation's military and law enforcement service animals. Over the years, I have witnessed an enduring truth: the bond between a handler and a service animal continues long after active service has ended.

Veterans, law enforcement officers, families, and friends regularly return to our grounds to honor the dogs and horses that stood faithfully beside them. These visits serve as a powerful reminder that these animals are remembered not simply for their utility, but for the profound loyalty, courage, and sacrifice they shared with the people they served.

While various communities across America have found meaningful ways to honor these remarkable partners locally, their collective, historical legacy has never been recognized through a singular national monument that reflects their contributions across the entirety of our country's history. Remembrance is one of the highest forms of respect a nation can offer, and a unified national tribute is long overdue.

For these reasons, I respectfully submit that the National Service Animals Monument represents a subject of exceptional national significance. Their historical contributions to our national security and public safety make this monument entirely worthy of consideration for placement within the National Mall Reserve.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Philip Weitlauf

Philip Weitlauf
Founder, Michigan War Dog Memorial

July 31, 2026

Written Testimony of Dr. Cindy Otto
Penn Vet Working Dog Center
Before the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

Madam Chair and Members of the Commission:

Through my 35-year career in veterinary medicine and my extensive work with working dogs, I have seen firsthand the extraordinary capabilities of these animals in safeguarding lives, made possible only by the incredible partnerships they form with their handlers. I am pleased to support the National Service Animals Monument and the history it seeks to bring into our national memory.

Modern working dogs are elite athletes that perform missions of remarkable complexity. They partner with their handlers to harness extraordinary sensory abilities in search and rescue, disaster response, detection, and other public-safety roles. Creating the operational team requires careful selection, training, veterinary science, and, critically, the relationship between dog and handler.

My experience with search-and-rescue dogs deployed following the September 11 attacks reinforced the importance of these teams during moments of national crisis. In circumstances of extraordinary devastation, working dogs and their handlers brought specialized capabilities, determination, and hope to an effort that demanded the very best of both.

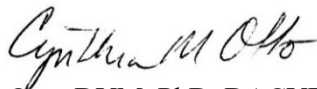
Today's highly trained working dogs are part of a much longer history of animals working in partnership with Americans. Science has expanded our understanding of what these animals can do, while qualities such as communication, reliability, and mutual dependence link modern teams with generations that came before them.

The significance of this history extends well beyond any single profession or event. Working animals have served in military operations, law enforcement, search and rescue, disaster response, assistance, medical detection, and other roles that protect lives and strengthen communities. Together, these partnerships demonstrate the remarkable role of human-animal cooperation in service to our nation.

A national monument devoted to service animals and their human partners would allow Americans to understand this long arc of history in one place. It would honor past sacrifice while educating the public about current forms of service and about the science, training and trust that make these partnerships possible.

In my professional judgment, this enduring history has exceptional national significance and deserves serious consideration for recognition within the National Mall Reserve.

Sincerely,



Dr. Cynthia Otto, DVM, PhD, DACVECC, DACVSMR
Executive Director, Penn Vet Working Dog Center
Professor of Working Dog Sciences and Sports Medicine,
University of Pennsylvania
cmotto@vet.upenn.edu
215-898-3390

**Written Testimony of John Miller
President and CEO
Guide Dog Foundation and America's VetDogs**

Before the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

Chair and distinguished members of the Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective about the proposed National Service Animals Monument.

As President and CEO of the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind and America's VetDogs, two sister national nonprofit organizations, I have the privilege of witnessing every day how service animals transform and save lives. Guide Dog Foundation serves people who are blind, have low vision, or other disabilities. America's VetDogs serves veterans, active-duty service members, and first responders living with physical disabilities, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other visible and less apparent physical and emotional injuries. Across both organizations, these extraordinary partnerships restore independence, create opportunities, foster confidence, and, in many cases, save lives. As we like to say, service animals help those we serve Live Without Boundaries.

These partnerships are not a recent development. For more than 250 years, service animals have quietly contributed to the American story, helping individuals overcome barriers to mobility, education, employment, community participation, and public life. They have enabled generations of Americans to live with greater freedom, dignity, and self-reliance while reflecting our nation's enduring commitment to inclusion, equal opportunity, and service.

In recent years, one service dog in particular, Sully H.W. Bush, helped bring this work into the national consciousness. Millions of Americans came to recognize Sully, who we were proud to train at America's VetDogs, through his devoted service to President George H.W. Bush and the powerful images that followed the President's passing. Sully became one of the most recognized ambassadors for all working and service animals, helping the public better understand the extraordinary bond between these animals and the people whose lives they enrich. Sully continues to serve as part of our facility dog program in partnership with Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

While Sully's story is exceptional, it represents thousands of guide dogs and service dogs whose dedication has quietly changed - and often saved - lives in communities across our nation every day.

Throughout my career, I have seen these partnerships accomplish far more than practical assistance. A guide dog gives a person who is blind the confidence and freedom to navigate the world independently. A service dog can help a veteran with PTSD reengage with family, work, and community. For someone living with a mobility disability, a service dog can restore the ability to accomplish everyday tasks with dignity. These partnerships expand opportunity, reduce isolation, improve safety, and frequently provide the confidence and stability that allow people to

reclaim their lives and the lives of their families, friends, and loved ones. They also help change public perceptions of disability by demonstrating capability rather than limitation and advancing a more welcoming America, especially for our nation's veterans.

The National Service Animals Monument would recognize this remarkable legacy within the broader history of human-animal partnership in service to our nation. Just as importantly, it would educate future generations about the profound and enduring contributions service animals have made and continue to make to American life. It would commemorate not only extraordinary animals, but also the ideals they help advance: freedom, independence, dignity, service, hope, and opportunity. Service animals are a vital part of the American story.

In my view, this more-than-250-year history is one of exceptional and enduring national significance. It deserves recognition within the National Mall Reserve as a lasting tribute to the service animals that have helped generations of Americans live safer, fuller, and more independent lives—and to the enduring partnerships that continue to strengthen our nation every day.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Miller', with a stylized, flowing script.

John Miller
President and CEO
Guide Dog Foundation and America's VetDogs

Submitted: August 5, 2026



July 30, 2026

Dear Chair and distinguished members of the Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide perspective regarding the proposed National Service Animals Monument.

As CEO of Canine Companions, I have the privilege of leading an organization that has spent decades providing expertly trained service dogs to children, adults and veterans with disabilities across the United States. Canine Companions created the modern service dog concept, and every day I see firsthand the extraordinary partnerships that develop between service dogs and the people whose lives they help transform.

While these partnerships often begin with one individual, their impact extends far beyond a single person. Families are strengthened. Careers become possible. Educational opportunities expand. Communities become more inclusive. Veterans regain confidence. Children discover new independence. The benefits ripple outward in ways that are often unseen.

These partnerships represent one of the most successful examples of human-animal collaboration in modern American society. Thousands of highly trained service dogs serve Americans across the country, demonstrating the profound and lasting value of these partnerships.

The National Service Animals Monument tells a story that extends well beyond any one organization or type of service animal. It recognizes a broad national tradition that includes military working dogs, law-enforcement K-9s, search-and-rescue teams, guide and assistance dogs, medical-detection dogs, therapy animals and others whose partnerships have strengthened our nation.

Helping future generations understand the profound impact these partnerships have had—and continue to have—on American society would be one of the monument's greatest contributions. This history holds exceptional and enduring national significance and merits consideration for recognition within the National Mall Reserve.

Respectfully,

Paige Mazzoni, CEO

Headquarters & Northwest Training Center

2965 Dutton Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95407-5711
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canine.org



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CONTACT INFORMATION

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July 30th, 2026

Dear Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission:

I am pleased to support the National Service Animals Monument and its request to be found eligible for placement within the National Mall Reserve.

As Executive Director of Assistance Dogs International (ADI), the leading global accrediting authority for assistance dog organizations, I have had the privilege of seeing firsthand how highly trained service dogs change lives every day. These remarkable partnerships provide independence, safety, confidence, dignity, and opportunity to countless individuals and families across the United States and around the world.

That work is part of a much broader American legacy. For generations, service animals have stood beside members of the military, law enforcement officers, first responders, and people with disabilities. Their service has protected lives, expanded opportunities, strengthened communities, and reflected some of our nation's finest values. Often working behind the scenes and without recognition, these animals have made immeasurable contributions to the well-being, safety, and independence of millions of Americans.

In my view, this is precisely the kind of nationally significant story that deserves lasting recognition. The National Service Animals Monument would honor a legacy that has shaped our country for generations while recognizing the extraordinary partnership between people and the animals that serve beside them. It would also help educate future generations about the remarkable contributions of service animals and the important role they continue to play in American society.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage the Commission to find the National Service Animals Monument eligible for placement within the National Mall Reserve.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

David Locklin
Executive Director
Assistance Dogs International (ADI)
(248) 860-8368
david@assistedogsinternational.org

The Global Authority in the Assistance Dogs Industry

August 5, 2026

From: Susan M. Stejskal, LVT, PhD

To: Susan Bahary

Re: National Service Animals Monument

Madam Chair and Members of the Commission,

My name is Dr. Susan Stejskal. I have been a human remains detection (HRD) canine (K9) trainer and handler for over 25 years, working in law enforcement as a Special or Reserve Deputy and a Reserve K9 Officer. I have had the honor and privilege to have partnered with 5 dogs who help me serve people and communities, sometimes at their darkest hours.

HRD K9s perform a service that many Americans fortunately will never utilize. Trained HRD K9s are able to assist with the location of missing decedents who may be on land or in water. Whether working in criminal investigations (e.g. homicides, suicides) or simply someone with Alzheimer's disease who wanders off, these K9 teams may help provide answers, allow a loved one to be brought home, and possibly, help families come to terms with their loss.

I personally know first-hand the time, commitment, and emotional bond that exists with my K9 partners. Many people do not understand the important role that HRD K9s play and I do believe that HRD K9 teams provide an essential, though often unseen, chapter in the long history of animals serving the American people. This is often at time when the families' need are the greatest.

HRD K9s are one part of a much broader history of service animals and their handlers that reaches across generations, professions, and communities. I believe this history has exceptional national significance, and I respectfully ask the Commission to recommend the National Service Animals Monument for placement within the National Mall Reserve.

The contribution of HRD K9s and the extraordinary partnerships we share with these amazing animals deserves to be recognized as part of our shared national heritage. These K9s deserve to be remembered alongside the many other animals that have served and strengthened American lives.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Lt. Kenneth Leonas

U.S. Park Police - Horse Mounted Patrol Unit

Before the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

To the Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission:

My name is Lieutenant Kenneth Leonas, and I have served with the United States Park Police since 2008. For the past thirteen years, I have served with the Horse Mounted Patrol Unit, where I currently oversee training and help prepare new mounted officers for duty. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today, and I offer these remarks in my personal capacity, based on my own experience working alongside police horses here in our nation's capital.

My years with the Mounted Unit gave me a close view of the human-animal partnership at the heart of this Monument. A mounted team is developed over time through consistent training, care and shared experience. Each horse has an individual temperament, reactions and abilities. The officer must learn that horse closely, while the horse learns to respond to the officer's voice, movements and direction. I've learned that a police horse is never simply a means of transportation or another piece of equipment. They are living partners with their own personality, instincts, strengths, and limitations. Every day, they answer calls for service alongside us, and every day we place our trust in one another. That partnership cannot be rushed. It is developed over months and years through consistent training, care, and shared experience.

Trust is built gradually and tested in demanding surroundings. Horse and rider must remain aware of one another amid noise, crowds and sudden movement. The officer carries responsibility for the horse's welfare and confidence, and the horse brings its own judgment, sensitivity and abilities to the work. The strength of the team comes from that mutual reliance.

The National Mall Reserve holds particular significance because this history is not only remembered there, it continues there every single day. Through the generosity and vision of the Trust for the National Mall, the United States Park Police Horse Mounted Patrol now operates from a purpose-built stable located on the National Mall itself. That facility is far more than a working barn; it serves as an educational center where thousands of visitors each year can learn about mounted policing, the history of working horses, and the vital role service animals have played throughout American and world history.

Visitors can witness these human-animal partnerships firsthand as mounted officers prepare for patrol and answer calls for service on the very grounds where this Service Animals Monument could stand. Placing the National Service Animals Monument within the National Mall Reserve, the U.S. Park Police Stables and proposed Memorial would create a unique and living connection between the history being commemorated and the service that continues today. Few memorials on the National Mall can tell their story through a living, working example. This Monument would not simply honor the legacy of service animals—it would stand as a testament to the remarkable animals that continue to serve our nation from that very location every day, while inspiring future

generations through education, public engagement, and firsthand observation of these extraordinary partnerships.

The National Mall is where our nation tells its story. It honors the people, ideals, and sacrifices that shaped the United States. Yet that story cannot be told completely without recognizing the working animals that helped build our country. Horses plowed our fields, hauled the materials that built our cities, transported goods and people across a growing nation, carried soldiers into battle, and powered American agriculture, industry, and commerce for generations. Their contributions laid the foundation upon which our nation was built. Today, that legacy continues through military working animals, police horses and K-9s, search-and-rescue teams, service animals, conservation animals, and many others who continue serving the American people. A National Service Animals Monument would recognize that this partnership is not simply part of our past, it is an enduring part of our national story.

My experience is in mounted policing, yet the same fundamental partnership extends across many kinds of animals and many forms of service. Together, these relationships represent a broad and continuing national history. I believe this history has the exceptional national significance required for placement within the National Mall Reserve.

I respectfully ask the Commission to recommend the National Service Animals Monument for placement within the National Mall Reserve.

Sincerely,

Lieutenant Kenneth Leonas
U.S. Park Police - Horse Mounted Patrol Unit
Submitted in a personal capacity

Written Testimony of Dr. (LTC) Richard A. Vargus

Military Working Dog Perspective

Before the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

Madam Chair and Members of the Commission:

I am honored to offer my support for the National Service Animals Monument and the history it seeks to commemorate. I was honored to direct all canine operations in the CENTOM area of responsibility and the Department of Defense Military Working Dog Program Manager.

Military Working Dogs have served alongside American service members for generations, performing missions in which lives often depend upon their abilities, training and courage. They have detected explosives and other threats, guarded installations, protected personnel and leaders, supported combat operations, and helped bring service members home safely. Behind every mission is a partnership between animal and handler built on trust, discipline, mutual dependence and absolute commitment.

The modern American Military Working Dog tradition extends across more than eight decades of formally organized service, while the broader use of animals in support of American military missions reaches much further back in our history. The missions and technologies have changed, but the essential relationship has endured: Troops, past and present, have relied upon specially trained canines to not only detect explosives and narcotics, but their sense of human dangers. Saving lives. This is the only living detection system, incapable of being matched by any technology known to man.

Military Working Dogs are a success story. One chapter of service, that includes animals serving in law enforcement, search and rescue, guide and assistance work, electronics, medical detection, and therapy. And the ability to continue to train dogs for other forms of detection, limitless. It's the partnership with the handler and dogs that reveal an enduring dimension of "canine" American history that crosses every one of our nation's significant events.

Many of the events and conflicts in which these teams served are already represented within our nation's commemorative landscape, but the contributions of the animals and handlers themselves have never been brought together and permanently recognized as the continuing American story they represent. The National Service Animals Monument would help complete that history rather than compete with the memorials already there.

For generations, these animals have served beside Americans when the stakes were at their highest. I believe the history of these partnerships is of exceptional and enduring national significance and deserves serious consideration for recognition within the National Mall Reserve.

Respectfully,

Dr. (LTC) Richard A. Vargus

Madam Chair and Members of the Commission,

My name is Ron Aiello. I am a Marine Corps Vietnam veteran, former Scout Dog handler, and Chairman of the United States War Dogs Association. I respectfully support locating the National Service Animals Monument within the National Mall Reserve.

As a young Marine in Vietnam, I learned that survival often depended upon the extraordinary abilities of my Scout Dog, Stormy. Like thousands of military working dogs before and after him, Stormy served without regard for recognition. He simply did his job, protecting Marines whose lives depended on his senses, training, and courage.

For many years after Vietnam, the service of military working dogs and their handlers received far less public recognition than it deserved. I have spent decades working to preserve that history so future generations understand the sacrifices these teams made together. That experience has convinced me that our military story is inseparable from the remarkable animals who served beside us.

At the same time, I have come to appreciate that military working dogs are only one chapter in a much larger American story. Across our nation's history, animals have faithfully served alongside people in the armed forces, law enforcement, search and rescue, disability assistance, conservation, and many other forms of public service. A single national monument honoring all of these partnerships tells that broader story in a way no individual memorial can.

For that reason, I believe the National Mall Reserve is the right setting. Visitors come there to understand the people and defining moments that shaped our nation. Recognizing the service animals who helped make many of those achievements possible adds an important dimension to that understanding without diminishing the significance of any existing memorial.

I offer this support not simply as the head of an organization, but as someone whose life was forever changed by serving beside an extraordinary dog. Stormy represented the very best qualities of loyalty, courage, discipline, and selfless service. Countless handlers across generations could say the same of their own partners.

After a lifetime devoted to ensuring that military working dogs are never forgotten, I believe this monument will finally place their service-and the service of all America's working animal partners-within its proper national context.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your service to our nation's commemorative future.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Aiello". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a stylized "A".

Ron Aiello
Marine Corps Vietnam Veteran
Former Scout Dog Handler
Chairman, United States War Dogs Association



THE UNITED STATES WAR DOGS ASSOCIATION

HONORING OUR NATION'S WAR DOGS AND THEIR HANDLERS: **PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE**



To the Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission:

My name is Chris Willingham. I am President of the United States War Dogs Association, a United States Marine veteran and a former military-working-dog handler, kennel master and trainer.

A military working dog is trained for demanding assignments, but training alone does not explain what makes a team effective. The handler must learn the dog's signals, strengths, limits and changes in behavior. The dog, in turn, learns to trust the person at the other end of the leash. In dangerous conditions, that understanding can become a matter of life and death.

Those who have handled these dogs know that the obligation does not end when a patrol, deployment or military career is over. The effects of service can remain with both members of the team. Handlers remember the dogs who protected them, absorbed risk beside them and helped them perform duties that could not have been accomplished in the same way alone.

When military working dogs retire, they often carry the physical effects of their busy careers. Care of their tired bodies – worn from years of faithful service – becomes the responsibility of the families who adopt them. Despite everything they have given in service to our nation, there is no dedicated federal funding for their ongoing veterinary care. The obligation to ensure they live healthy, comfortable retirements has therefore fallen largely to their handlers, adopters and organizations such as the United States War Dogs Association.

Every day, I see families willingly take on significant financial and emotional commitments because they believe, as I do, that these dogs earned far more than our gratitude. They earned our continued care.

A National Service Animals Monument would help tell that story. It would ensure that future generations understand that these animals were not simply assets employed by the military but faithful partners who served beside America's military personnel. It would also recognize the enduring commitment between handlers and their dogs: A commitment that extends beyond active duty.

The Reserve is visited by people who come to learn what the nation has chosen to value and preserve. NSAM would add a missing perspective to that experience by showing that animals have served inside consequential national events and that the people beside them were permanently affected by those partnerships.

I urge the Commission to support Reserve eligibility for this Monument. Future visitors should encounter an honest account of the work, the bond and the responsibility. Those lessons are worthy of a national audience.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Willingham
President
United States War Dogs Association

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF CHAN FOLLEN

Gold Star Family Perspective — John Douangdara and Military Working Dog Bart

To the Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission:

My name is Chan Follen. I am the sister of John Douangdara, who was killed in Afghanistan in 2011 while serving with his military working dog, Bart.

For my family, John is not a name from a military account. He is my brother. Bart is part of how we remember his service because they worked, trusted and faced danger as a team.

Congress authorized the National Service Animals Monument in 2022, and I understand that the Commission is now considering whether its subject is significant enough for inclusion within the National Mall Reserve. I believe it is. The Reserve is where the country recognizes service and loss as matters belonging to the nation, not only to individual families.

Placing NSAM within the Reserve would acknowledge John and Bart as part of a much broader history of people and animals who served together. It would give families a place to know that both members of these teams are remembered, while helping the public understand more fully what their service required.

I respectfully ask the Commission to support the National Service Animals Monument's eligibility for placement within the National Mall Reserve.

Respectfully submitted,

Chan Follen
Gold Star Sister

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chan Follen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.



BERGIN UNIVERSITY of **CANINE STUDIES**

August 7, 2026

Madam Chair and Members of the Commission:

I am pleased to offer my strong support for the National Service Animals Monument and for its proposed location within the National Mall Reserve.

For more than five decades, I have devoted my professional life to advancing the role of service dogs in American society. What began as a pioneering concept has evolved into a nationwide movement that has transformed the lives of veterans, people with disabilities, first responders, and countless others seeking greater independence, confidence, and opportunity. Today, service dog programs throughout the United States—and around the world—trace their roots to work that began here in America.

The history represented by this Monument reaches far beyond any single discipline or profession. It recognizes a longstanding American tradition of people and animals working together in service to others. Military working dogs, law enforcement animals, guide and assistance dogs, search-and-rescue teams, therapy animals, medical detection dogs, and many other service animals have made extraordinary contributions to our nation while strengthening the bond between humans and animals.

As someone who has spent a lifetime studying and advancing these partnerships, I believe this story represents an important chapter in American history. It reflects our nation's capacity for innovation, compassion, service, and the belief that lives can be transformed through extraordinary partnerships between people and animals.

In my professional judgment, the history commemorated by the National Service Animals Monument is of exceptional national significance and deserves permanent recognition within the National Mall Reserve.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonita (Bonnie) Bergin, Ed.D.
Founder, Bergin University of Canine Studies
Pioneer of the Modern Service Dog Movement