

**Written Testimony for National Capital
Memorial Advisory Commission
Public Meeting on March 21, 2022**

**by
Susan Bahary, Artist for the National Services Animals Memorial**

Hello Distinguished Members of the Commission and Guests. I'm Susan Bahary, the selected artist for the proposed Memorial.

It is humbling to be before you to give testimony and to give voice to the animals and their handlers who have served and sacrificed for our country since its founding.

I was forever changed with my creation of our country's first official war dog monument "Always Faithful", unveiled at the Pentagon in 1994 and dedicated at the War Dog Cemetery on the US Naval Base on Guam. At that dedication, I saw first hand how Marines in their twilight years were determined to make the long trip to the Island they served on 50 years prior with their faithful war dogs, to honor their service and sacrifice and say their final goodbyes with a wreath and a salute. Their dogs saved their lives and they were forever grateful. It's been my honor to create monuments to service animals and their handlers around the world ever since.

My vision for this memorial is to recognize the human/animal bond as seen through our remarkable service animals and handlers, who provide for our safety, security and independence. Without them, wars would not have been won or been as successful, communities would not be as safe, missing children or those buried in rubble would not be saved and many of our disabled civilians and veterans would not have their independence, improved quality of life or even their will to live.

My dream is to do justice for them to have a Memorial **for the first time** in the nation's capital. It is long overdue.

Animals have a way of opening up people's hearts for good and bringing us together. My dream for this memorial is that it will do just that for all our citizens and visitors worldwide, regardless of their background, and that it will bring people together for something we can all agree upon: Honoring the life-saving and life-enriching work of our service animals and those who work with them, and recognition for our great country that is strong, yet compassionate enough to recognize their importance with a National Memorial.

I can only imagine the depth of gratitude, interest and emotion that will be generated by the National Service Animals Memorial.

-I envision:

- Parents bringing their children as they learn in wonderment of our rich, history, through the stories of our service animal teams.
- That it engenders pride for our country and that people are inspired by the beauty of the Memorial and its fine art.
- That Service animal handlers will feel honored and proud to be recognized on a national level for their service and sacrifice
- That People with disabilities will feel included and understood.
- That it will raise compassion for each other and for our animals.
- That Handlers who have lost their animals will find it to be a place of healing.
- That the public will find our Educational App a useful resource
- That Visitors from other countries will be inspired and realize we are a compassionate country.

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "A nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

While I've created designs for this Memorial, I remain flexible, of course, to the future expert suggestions of the Fine Arts Commission.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Now I would like to introduce Theresa Brandon, President of the National Service Animals Monument Corporation, a decorated Marine and disabled veteran.