

Hello,

Thank you for allowing me to take your time today to discuss what I feel is a very worthwhile addition to our Nation's Capital monuments.

My name is Valerie Cramer, I have trained Guide Dogs for the Blind and now train Service Dogs for the disabled at the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind and America's VetDogs.

I would like to introduce you to Sully H. W. Bush who is here with me today. Sully was Former President George H. W. Bush's Service Dog and faithful friend up until his passing in November 2018. President Bush will be remembered by many in the disabled community for the monumental piece of legislation that prohibited discrimination against those with disabilities, the Americans with Disabilities Act. Twenty-eight years later Former President H. W. Bush found himself benefiting from that law as he utilized Sully during public outings and to assist him in his home. Sully was more than just a Service Dog to President Bush, he was a member of the family, he was a loving companion to President Bush as he adjusted to the loss of his wife Barbara. Sully was a part of the happiest of Bush occasions as well as the saddest of occasions as he flew on Air Force One from Texas to Washington DC with the family to bring Former President Bush to the Capitol Rotunda to be honored by the American people.

Over the years, I have placed hundreds of Service Dogs that help disabled members of our community to be more independent and self-reliant. Each and every one of the individuals that I have worked with consider their dogs to be an extension of themselves. There are Service Dogs specifically trained to assist the hearing disabled, those with mobility issues, are blind, have diabetes, autism, epilepsy and those with hidden disabilities like PTSD to name a few. Service dogs can offer a bridge to communicating with a group of individuals that in the past have been disconnected from the community. These dogs are everywhere throughout our country playing an important role in the lives of their human partners, they bond with their handlers and become non-judgmental loving friends. Service dogs not only assist the one person they serve but they can change the dynamic in a family, they offer security to family members who know that their loved ones will have support when they are not there to assist them.

There are very few Service Dogs that get the recognition that Sully has received. The great majority of Service Dogs perform their work without media attention. Service Dog users know their dogs will never be famous for the life-saving tasks that they perform each day. Service Dogs work every day assisting the disabled in our community with little recognition even though they are most deserving of that recognition. Having a location in Washington DC where people can gather to recognize the important role that Service Dogs play in the lives of the disabled members in our society is a way to show that we value the dogs that serve their human partners as well as the disabled individuals that utilize Service Dogs. I believe a monument to Service Dogs is a unique way to honor everyone that uses Service Dogs as well as the broad community that benefits from the independent lives of disabled individuals.