

NATIONAL CAPITAL MEMORIAL ADVISORY COMMISSION (NCMAC)

Honorable Members of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission,
Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.

I'm here to testify to the healing power of animals from my own experience having survived a plane crash in 2008. I found empowerment through the companionship of horses and dogs. These animals helped restore my well-being, control my emotions and find joy. Trauma requires expertise to find healing and animals are capable of providing these comforting therapeutic services despite the noticeable disability of them not being able to speak English.

My non-profit Love Hope Ranch specializes in Equine Assisted Therapy and partners with service dog organizations nationwide for Veterans, First Responders and their families. We believe that those with trauma and mental health conditions can find emotional freedom, companionship and healing through partnering with service animals. As one client once remarked, "Animals require us to show up, be present, vulnerable and transparent". That dynamic between client and horse requires each to let down their guard and build trust in a shared space while finding safety.

I chose horses because clients come to us with deep seeded emotional pain. They are coupled with a sense of hopelessness and defeat. They are introduced to a 1500 lb. animal and feel empowered to push through their anxieties. The horses empathically bond to each client. They have this innate ability to mirror our subconscious selves in real time keeping us present and grounded during a session in the arena. I have recently seen these breakthroughs with four clients. All suffered sexual trauma as early as three years of age. These individuals endured devastating abuse, all of whom were sexually assaulted by family members. They never had the support or protection to guard them from such dangers. After decades of different therapeutic modalities, they are now finding peace by acknowledging their internal grief and shame they have been carrying through the work with these horses. This equine therapy opportunity provides a platform to witness true freedom of mind & spirit, establishment of healthy connections and rebuilding of the family unit.

Lastly, this leads me to the service animal monument being proposed for Washington D.C. This monument would be a fitting tribute to these animals' faithful and loyal service. Military and Law Enforcement rely on animals from horses to K-9's to marine mammals. They assist in vital roles for their handlers on land, at sea and in the air. They provide an invaluable service to our nation and deserve not only our adoration but our gratitude.

For generations animals have led us in to battle, stood in the gap to be our eyes and ears and are a true representation of honor and selfless service.

Thank you very much for your time.

Melissa "Missy" Craft