



Tony La Russa's
**Animal
Rescue
Foundation**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 7, 2019

Contact: Erin Thompson, Marketing Manager
925.296.3103 | ethompson@arflife.org

Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation announces support of PAWS for Veteran Therapy Act

Bill sets new standards for service dog training to benefit veterans with PTSD

WALNUT CREEK, California (November 7, 2019) – Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF) continues to champion support for the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) for Veteran Therapy Act (HR 4305), which would fund a Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) pilot program for veterans with PTSD or other service-related mental health challenges to train and receive benefits of psychiatric service dogs. The bill's sponsor, Rep. Steve Stivers (R-OH), sought expertise gained from ARF's Pets and Vets program while drafting the legislation.

"We've seen tremendous success with ARF's Pets and Vets program Saving Both Ends of the Leash®, and this bill carries the model to even greater national prominence to help more veterans around the nation," says ARF Executive Director Elena Bicker "It's important that we share our experiences with those who can influence development of psychiatric service dog programs for veterans."

PAWS for Veteran Therapy Act was introduced by Stivers in a bi-partisan effort to bring the therapeutic benefits of service dogs to veterans in need. "Studies by Kaiser Permanente and Purdue University show significant, statistical benefits from this therapy in reducing substance abuse, enhancing and encouraging interpersonal relationships, and reducing depression-related metrics for veterans, including a reduction in suicide," explained Stivers when filing HR 4305.

The bill sets up the VA to promote nonprofit programs similar ARF's Pets and Vets program. In a significant shift from previously proposed legislation, the PAWS for Veteran Therpay Act includes ARF's proposal to focus on veterans participating in positive-reinforcement training of their own service dogs. "We're happy to see that this legislation has incorporated our recommendations," says Bicker. "We've seen amazing results with our Pets and Vets program and are proud to support future programs designed to benefit the well-being of both veterans and dogs."

ARF's Pets and Vets program identifies dogs in overcrowded shelters who might have the necessary qualities to change a veteran's life. These dogs are carefully selected and matched with veterans with PTSD. Like trusted battle buddies, they train together for approximately a year to become certified service dog teams. "The additional benefits to a veteran in this type of dual training program include emotional support, increased confidence, a deeper bond with the dog, and a greater sense of purpose and accomplishment," explains Bicker.

The bill is currently pending in the House Veterans Affairs committee. This hybrid legislation reconciles two widely supported bills from the 115th Congress: Veterans Dog Training Therapy Act (HR 2225) and Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers Act (HR 2327). Some of the current 38 co-sponsors include Gil Cisneros (D-CA), Kathleen Rice (D-NY), John Rutherford (R-FL), Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ), Michael Walz (R-FL), and Elissa Slotkin (D-MI).

About Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF) | www.arflife.org

At the core of ARF's mission is the rescue of dogs and cats who have run out of time at public or overcrowded shelters, giving them a chance at life. Since 1991, ARF has matched 42,000 pets with loving homes. Launched in 2011, ARF's innovative Pets and Vets program is Saving Both Ends of the Leash® and helps fulfill ARF's mission of People Rescuing Animals ... Animals Rescuing People®.

###

2890 Mitchell Drive, Walnut Creek, California 94598 • 925-256-1273 • www.arflife.org