



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

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**Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation Applauds House Passage
of PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act**

Legislation, which Includes Rescue's Pets and Vets Program Input, Moves to U.S. Senate for Approval

WALNUT CREEK, California (February 5, 2020) – Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF) today praised U.S. House of Representative passage of the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) for Veterans Therapy Act (HR 4305), which directs the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to create a pilot program pairing veterans with service-related mental health challenges with psychiatric service dogs. In a significant shift from similar, previously proposed legislation, this bill promotes veterans' participation in the positive-reinforcement training of their service dogs. Based on the success of ARF's similar Pets and Vets training model, PAWS author Rep. Steve Stivers (R-OH) sought ARF's expertise while drafting the legislations.

"This is an incredible accomplishment after many years of pushing the VA to recognize the significant therapeutic benefits of veterans with PTSD working with psychiatric service dogs," says ARF Executive Director Elena Bicker. "We're glad our experiences and achievements could assist in crafting legislation that could potentially help thousands of veterans and dogs across the county."

ARF's Pets and Vets program identifies dogs in overcrowded shelters who might have the necessary qualities to change a veteran's life. After careful assessment, the dogs are matched with veterans diagnosed with challenges such as PTSD, anxiety, agoraphobia, and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). The pairs train together for approximately a year before graduating as service dog teams. "The additional benefits to a veteran in this type of dual training include emotional support, a deeper bond with the dog, and a greater sense of purpose, confidence, and accomplishment," explains Bicker.

"Our veterans fought for our freedom, and I've heard from many veterans who say that's exactly what their service dog gives them – freedom. They're free to go to restaurants, to fly on planes, to go to the movies, things that post-traumatic stress had made impossible," Rep. Steve Stivers said. "Today's vote is a huge step towards getting veterans the care they've earned and need. I'm incredibly grateful to the cosponsors of this bill and look forward to it passing the Senate and becoming law."

The bill, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan House support, including 323 co-sponsors, now moves to the U.S. Senate, where companion legislation has been introduced by Senators Thom Tillis (R-NC), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Deb Fischer (R-NE).

ARF's Pets and Vets program is currently expanding nationally through partnerships with shelters around the nation. Completion of the program's national headquarters in Walnut Creek, CA is anticipated later this year.

"We say our program is Saving Both Ends of the Leash® because we see significant transformations between these veterans and dogs," said Bicker. "Passage of this legislation moves our country closer to providing those who have sacrificed so much the richer, fuller lives they deserve."

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®.

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