April 1, 2020

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: H.R. 4306, the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) for Veterans Therapy Act
City of Beverly Hills – Support

Dear Senator Feinstein,

On behalf of the City of Beverly Hills, I write to urge you to support the enactment of H.R. 4305, the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) for Veterans Therapy Act, which the House of Representatives passed by voice vote this past February. This bipartisan bill establishes an innovative pilot program aimed at treating veterans with post-deployment mental health symptoms.

The legislation requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to implement a new five-year pilot program to assess the effectiveness of addressing post-deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder through a therapeutic medium of training service dogs for veterans with disabilities. Under the bill, a veteran participating in the program would be paired with a prospective service dog and work with a qualified service dog training instructor to train the dog as a certified service animal. At the conclusion of the training, the service dog may either stay with its veteran trainer or be paired with another veteran in need.

Service animals are widely used to assist people to cope with a host of ailments including seizures, diabetes and autism. Moreover, it is not uncommon for companion dogs to accompany their owners on planes and trains to alleviate the mental stresses of travel. If service animals can perform these various functions, the VA should explore whether specially trained companion dogs can help veterans better cope with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions tied to their wartime service. According to the VA, in 2014 alone, an average of 20 veterans committed suicide per day. This is a national tragedy that must be addressed head on by the VA.

The federal government has a solemn obligation to explore programs that stand a reasonable chance of saving and improving the lives of our nation’s veterans. The PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act is such a program.

For these reasons, the City of Beverly Hills encourages you to support H.R. 4305, the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) for Veterans Therapy Act.

Sincerely,

Lester J. Friedman
Mayor, City of Beverly Hills