



Statement of Richard Brookshire
Co-Founder, Black Veterans Project
Before the House Veterans Affairs Committee
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Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost, and members of the Committee, on behalf of Black Veterans Project, thank you for the opportunity to share our views on the draft of the Housing Loan Forever Act.

It's been seventy-eight years since the initial crafting of the GI Bill. It is my hope that today our government might begin the steps necessary to redress a gaping economic chasm left to fester for Black military families who sent their best and brightest, strongest and most able to fight in America's wars, but faced obstruction from accessing the myriad of veterans benefits they'd earned upon returning home.

At the outset of the GI Bill when signed into law in 1944, our government condoned racial covenants, redlining, racially discriminatory practices in collegiate admissions and broader divestment from Black communities tantamount to economic lynching. Black America responded with a famed Double Victory campaign to champion military success against fascism overseas and to catalyze equality for Black Americans at home.

That campaign would be a failure, as our government decided against abiding by this call to action and became derelict in its duty to serve and protect returning Black GIs, the vast majority of whom faced barriers to the utilization of their housing and education benefits under an iniquitous national network of Jim Crow policies bent on locking them out of what would come to be the most significant social welfare program ever designed by this government.

The impact has been vast, devastating and intergenerational. It is exemplified today amongst 12 million descendants of Black World War II veterans forced to contend with a median racial wealth gap of \$164,000 compared to white families. A 2021 Brandeis University study found that descendants of a Black World War II veteran obstructed from accessing the GI Bill were owed approximately \$180,000 — the amount of GI Bill benefits a white military family received between 1945 and 1956.



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As our nation made historical strides in civil rights into the 1950s and '60s, Black military families would continue to send their sons and daughters off to foreign wars, only to face new and ingenious mechanisms of obstruction to veterans' benefits that would compound the harms already suffered, add insult to injury and cement economic inequality for generations to come.

Conley Monk — the son of a World War II veteran who never accessed the GI Bill, is a former Marine and Vietnam War veteran who recently filed a landmark lawsuit led by Yale Law School in *Monk v. U.S.* alleging decades of gross negligence by the Department of Veterans Affairs in confronting how racial discrimination affected the allocation of veterans benefits.

Mr. Monk was denied access to a VA home loan for over 40 years.

The Monk family story is important for two reasons. One, both Conley and his father never gained access to the GI Bill despite honorable military service. Two, decades of hardship Conley endured resulted in him discouraging his own children from serving in our nation's military. They now serve nobly as law enforcement officers in their respective communities at a time when the Department of Defense faces major shortfalls in recruiting its all-volunteer force. The Monk family has earned the VA Home Loan benefit twice and deserves to pass it down to descendants as a form of repair.

At the outset of the 117th Congress, the introduction of the Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox GI Bill Restoration Act became a beacon of hope and possibility. After eight decades, our country must recognize the injustice levied on Black veterans and do something to redress it.

The draft legislation being discussed today has taken several shapes to ensure redress is both targeted and facially neutral – not an easy task. I want to extend my deep gratitude to Matria Spotser for her work on this issue and to the House Veterans Affairs Committee for moving it forward.

Black Veterans Project supports redress legislation specifically targeting multiple descendants of World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War era veterans. We advise against placing parameters that would preclude large swaths of descendants from accessing this benefit. Shortened timeframes for utilization that fall below 10 years should be avoided. Any insinuation that repair might dilute the VA home loan program by making it disproportionately available to non-veterans should recognize that *military families* are the backbone of our country and



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military. The VA-home loan program is a benefit these families earned and were widely denied access to. This is not a hand-out. In fact, its revenue-generating. The first two GI Bills yielded a federal return of \$60 Billion in tax revenue for \$21 Billion invested. Racial obstruction of the VA home loan undercut that federal return by untold billions.

It is my hope to evoke courage and commitment toward fostering repair. Homeownership has been foundational to the American dream. The GI Bill helped to realize that dream for millions of Americans, but not for all who earned it — it's time to fix that by enabling the transfer of an unused VA home loan benefit to descendants under the Housing Loan Forever Act.

Thank you for allowing me to provide this testimony. I look forward to working with you to move this legislation forward in the 118th Congress.