



Statement of Richard Brookshire  
Co-Founder, Black Veterans Project  
*Before the House Veterans Affairs Committee*  
Wednesday, December 14, 2022

**Statement for Richard Brookshire**  
**Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer**  
*of*  
**Black Veterans Project**  
*before a hearing of the*  
**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**  
**118th Congress, Second Session**  
**June 12, 2023**

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of Black Veterans Project, thank you for the opportunity to share our views on H.R.8607, the Housing Loan Forever Act.

Black Veterans Project is a nonpartisan 501(c)3 non-profit organization that advances research, litigation, and narrative storytelling to advance racial equity and reparative justice in and out of uniform. Core to our mission is making reparations for descendants of Black World War II veterans real in our lifetime.

June 22nd marks eighty years since the GI Bill was initially drafted and passed into law in 1944.

This past week, we've venerated the heroic actions of American troops on the shores of Normandy. Today, we must remember an uncomfortable truth — that the horrors of Jim Crow segregation were reinforced by how our government chose to administer the GI Bill's housing and education benefit programs.

The sacrifices of over 1 million Black GIs were met with redlining, racial covenants, discriminatory practices in banking and collegiate admissions and broader divestments tantamount to an economic lynching.

Collectively, these policies coalesced to ensure diminutive numbers of Black veterans and military families could access nor utilize their VA home loans. VA's home loan program set millions of white veterans on the path to homeownership and the accumulation of generational wealth — bolstering and transforming the American middle class.

The opportunity to right this particular historical wrong is overdue, and the time to act has come.



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## **H.R.8607 - VA Housing Loan Forever Act**

Black Veterans Project unequivocally supports legislation to amend Title 38 of the United States Code to make certain legatees of certain veterans eligible for housing loans guaranteed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and for other purposes.

A 2021 Brandeis University study alleges that Black World War II veterans who were obstructed from accessing the GI Bill were denied approximately \$80,000 in wealth-generating benefits between 1945 and 1956. We encourage further exploration of how H.R.8607 can become law, maintaining a provision for utilization by multiple decedents.

A preliminary analysis by the Center for Responsible Lending in 2022 showed that expanding the VA housing loan pool would be revenue-generating, boost the housing market and have a net-positive impact on reducing housing insecurity for military families.

We implore removing any undue burdens on families seeking redress by placing minimal barriers to accessibility to this benefit. Rather, this bill must extend good faith to those who still must meet credit/income standards to qualify and access the VA home loan program.

Lastly, I would be remiss not to address how continued discrimination in lending persists today – evidenced by the CNN investigation into the practices of Navy Federal Credit Union and its home loan program late last year, whereby more than half of Black applicants were denied access to home loans.

Greater oversight and accountability are needed to ensure that all financial institutions participating in the Department of Veterans Affairs VA home loan program provide equitable access and are held accountable for patterns of discrimination. Audits of major lenders and penalties for bad actors must be implemented if we want to avoid repeating the sins of our past.

Ensuring all veterans and military families have equitable access to sustainable upward mobility is the responsibility of all of us.

Black Veterans Project appreciates the opportunity to express our views before this Subcommittee and we look forward to working closely with the staff members as this measure advances.