



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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July 26, 2023

Hon. Kevin McCarthy
Speaker
House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Mike Bost
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans Affairs
352 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Mark Takano
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans Affairs
2078 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Derrick Van Orden
Chairman
House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on
Economic Opportunity
1513 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Mike Levin
Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on
Economic Opportunity
2352 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

RE: H.R. 1255 – Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox GI Bill Restoration Act of 2023

Dear Speaker McCarthy, Leader Jeffries, Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, Chairman Van Orden and Ranking Member Levin:

We, the undersigned Attorneys General, write in support of H.R. 1255, the Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox GI Bill Restoration Act of 2023. The bill extends eligibility for certain housing loans and educational assistance to Black World War II veterans and their families who were denied access to these benefits on the basis of race.

Our decision to uplift this legislation on this date is intentional. Today marks the 75th anniversary of President Truman's signing of Executive Order 9981, on July 26, 1948, which mandated the desegregation of the U.S. military. This anniversary represents a powerful moment for us to

honor and reaffirm our commitment to supporting and expanding economic opportunity for all of American's veterans.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the original GI Bill, also known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, into law in 1944. The GI bill provided an unprecedented range of benefits, including low-cost mortgages, low-interest loans to start a business or farm, and dedicated payments of tuition and living expenses to attend high school, college, or vocational school, to World War II veterans. These benefits were administered by the federal government through the Secretary of the Veterans Administration. Widely hailed as one of the most significant pieces of legislation ever enacted by the U.S. government, the GI Bill lifted a generation of veterans and their families into the middle class and helped fuel the economic prosperity of the post-war period.ⁱ By 1955, the Veterans Administration had backed 4.3 million home loans under the program, with a face value of \$33 billion.ⁱⁱ The educational benefits provided under the GI bill were also generous enough to pay for any college in the country, and by 1947 half of all college students in America were veterans.ⁱⁱⁱ Notably, Congress estimated that for every dollar spent under the GI Bill, the US economy received seven dollars in return.^{iv}

Unfortunately, opportunities afforded to veterans through the GI bill were often denied to Black World War II veterans and their families. Although the legislative text of the GI Bill was race neutral, the administration of benefits was discriminatory.^v Institutions adopted the Federal Housing Administration's racial exclusion programs, known as redlining, which excluded Black World War II veterans from accessing the housing loan guaranty program. For example, in New York and northern New Jersey, less than 100 of the 67,000 mortgages insured by the GI Bill, or just 0.15 percent, supported home purchases by non-whites.^{vi} Black veterans were also denied access to educational benefits at certain universities on the basis of their race and were instead directed to vocational schools and chronically under-resourced Historically Black Colleges and Universities.^{vii}

The GI Bill Restoration Act extends access to VA home loans and the Post-911 GI Bill education assistance benefits to Black World War II veterans, and to their surviving spouses and certain direct descendants, who were denied benefits in the original bill. By expanding access to homeownership and education, this bill would help rectify past wrongs and fuel continued economic growth in communities across the country.

The undersigned Attorneys General share a deep belief in and commitment to supporting and advancing economic opportunity for all our nation's veterans. We recognize that there is much more work to do in that regard, especially to ensure that all veterans have access to the benefits they deserve, including healthcare, housing, education, and disability related benefits. In that spirit, we would support expanding the scope of the bill to cover any other veteran (or their descendant) who may have been unfairly denied benefits that they were entitled to under the GI Bill.

The Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox GI Bill Restoration Act of 2023 is a meaningful step toward repairing an historic injustice and honoring the service and sacrifices of our Black World War II veterans and their families.

Sincerely,



Andrea Joy Campbell
Massachusetts Attorney General



John Formella
New Hampshire Attorney General



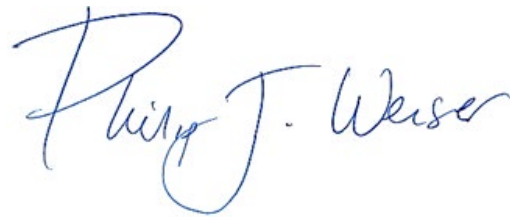
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Illinois Attorney General



Kris Mayes
Arizona Attorney General



Rob Bonta
California Attorney General



Philip J. Weiser
Colorado Attorney General



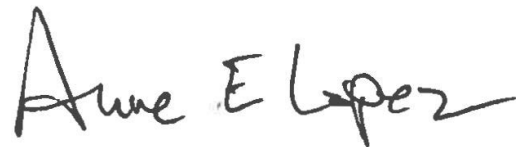
William Tong
Connecticut Attorney General



Kathy Jennings
Delaware Attorney General



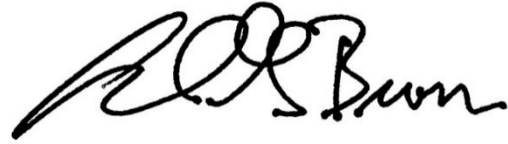
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Vermont Attorney General



Bob Ferguson
Washington State Attorney General



Joshua L. Kaul
Wisconsin Attorney General

ⁱ Linda J. Bilmes and Cornell William Brooks, *The GI Bill was one of the worst racial injustices of the 20th century. Congress can fix it.* <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/02/23/opinion/gi-bill-was-one-worst-racial-injustices-20th-century-congress-can-fix-it/> (February 23, 2022).

ⁱⁱ Servicemen's Readjustment Act (1944) Document Info, January 8, 2019, U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, cited in *The US' GI Bill: the 'New Deal for Veterans,'* Centre for Public Impact, September 2, 2019.

ⁱⁱⁱ The bill funded the education of 22,000 dentists, 67,000 doctors, 91,000 scientists, 238,000 teachers, 240,000 accountants and 450,000 engineers - as well as three Supreme Court justices, three presidents, 12 senators, 14 Nobel Prize winners and 24 Pulitzer Prize winners. See Ryan Katz, *The History of the GI Bill*, American Public Media Reports, September 3, 2015.

^{iv} R. Katz, (2015).

^v Matthew F. Delmont, *Half American: The Epic Story of African Americans Fighting World War II at Home and Abroad*. Viking, 2022. See also Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Liveright, May 2017; Bilmes and Brooks (2022); Tatjana Meschede, Maya Eden, Sakshi Jain, Eunjung Jee, Branden Miles, Mariela Martinez, Sylvia Stewart, Jon Jacob and Maria Madison, *IERE research Brief: Final Report from our GI Bill Study*, Brandeis University, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Institute for Economic and Racial Equity, December 2022; and Chinyere Agbai, *Wealth Begins at Home: The GI Bill of 1944 and the Making of the Racial Wealth Gap in Homeownership and Home Value* (2022), cited in Meschede, et. Al. (2022).

^{vi} Delmont (2022).

^{vii} Delmont (2022).