

Legislation Text

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Calling upon the United States Congress to pass the Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox G.I. Bill Restoration Act.

WHEREAS, The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the G.I. Bill, represented a promise to all who fought for our country that their service and sacrifice would be rewarded with a range of benefits, including low-cost mortgages, low-interest loans to establish businesses and farms, unemployment compensation, and tuition assistance; and

WHEREAS, In practice, this opportunity for prosperity was denied to Black World War II veterans - a historical, generational injustice that Congressmen James E. Clyburn and Seth Moulton seek to correct with last month's introduction of the Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox G.I. Bill Restoration Act, which they had previously introduced in the 117th Congress; and

WHEREAS, While the original G.I. Bill lifted up a generation of World War II veterans by empowering them to purchase homes and earn degrees, the discriminatory practices of the mid-20th century effectively closed these benefits off to Black veterans, thus denying them the opportunity to build the generational wealth that comes from homeownership and higher education; and

WHEREAS, The Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox G.I. Bill Restoration Act seeks to right these wrongs and honor our nation's commitment to its veterans by extending access to the VA Loan Guaranty Program and the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill to surviving spouses and descendants, and by establishing a Blue-Ribbon Panel to study inequities in the distribution of benefits and assistance and make recommendations on how to repair them; and

WHEREAS, The postwar experiences of Sgts. Woodard and Maddox, two relatively unknown Black World War II veterans, are illustrative examples of the purpose of, and need for, the legislation named for them; and

WHEREAS, Fresh from his honorable discharge and still in uniform, Sgt. Woodard was traveling home on a Greyhound bus when he was forcibly removed, struck in the face and permanently blinded with a blackjack, and jailed without medical treatment by a local police chief in South Carolina, who was charged but later acquitted by an all-white jury - a series of abusive events that compelled President Truman to order a federal investigation and issue Executive Orders 9980 and 9981, integrating the armed services and federal government; and

WHEREAS, Sgt. Maddox, who was injured on duty and medically discharged, had been accepted to a master's program at Harvard University, but his local VA office denied him the tuition assistance rightfully due to him under the G.I. Bill to "avoid setting a precedent." Only after seeking assistance from the NAACP did the VA in Washington, D.C. promise Sgt. Maddox the benefits to which he was entitled; and

WHEREAS, Sgts. Woodard and Maddox and the roughly one million Black servicemembers who served this nation in World War II did so because they believed in its promise of justice and equality for all, yet the

prosperity enjoyed by their white counterparts upon returning home was not extended to them by state and local administrators of federal benefits; and

WHEREAS, For example, in 1947, only 2 of 3,200 home loans administered by the VA in Mississippi went to Black veterans, and in the suburbs of New York and New Jersey, less than 1% of G.I. Bill-insured mortgages went to Black borrowers. In addition, only 6% of Black veterans earned degrees using G.I. Bill benefits, compared to 19% of white veterans; and

WHEREAS, The impact of these disparities deepens over generations, leading to wide gaps between whites and Blacks in homeownership, educational attainment, net worth, and accumulation of generational wealth which should not exist and must be corrected; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Does hereby call upon the United States Congress to pass the Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox G.I. Bill Restoration Act.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That a certified copy of this resolution be presented to local representatives of the United States Congress as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.