



Yale Law School
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BLACK VETERAN FILES SUIT OVER RACIAL DISPARITIES IN VA BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

VA Data Shows Black Veterans Denied Disability Benefits at Higher Rate than White Veterans

New Haven, CT – Today, Conley Monk Jr., a Black veteran of the Marine Corps, filed a lawsuit in federal court against the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) seeking redress for harm caused by longstanding racial disparities in veterans’ benefits programs. After he returned from service in the Vietnam War, the VA denied Mr. Monk’s applications for education, housing, and disability benefits for decades, before finally agreeing in December 2020 that he was, in fact, eligible all along. Since then, Mr. Monk has obtained records from the VA showing a statistically significant difference in benefits claims outcomes between Black and white veterans. Specifically, for decades, VA denied the applications of Black veterans at higher rates than their white counterparts.

“My father fought in the Army in World War II, and I went to Vietnam with the Marines. But like my father before me, I was mistreated by the VA for years, and other Black veterans were denied their rightful benefits. It’s time for the VA treat Black and white veterans equally,” said Mr. Monk, who is also the co-founder and director of the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress (NVCLR). NVCLR, along with the Black Veterans Project, filed the Freedom of Information Act requests that revealed longstanding racial disparities in VA claims outcomes. Mr. Monk is also filing an administrative claim on behalf of his late father, Conley Monk Sr., a Black Army veteran who served during World War II, fought at Normandy, and yet was denied veterans’ benefits in the 1940s. The Monks’ story shows the generational harm that VA has caused Black veterans and their families.

“I am deeply concerned by reports of racial discrimination in VA care and benefits,” said U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and a veteran of the Marine Corps. “Stronger oversight and clear action should be taken promptly to stop any discrimination— absolutely abhorrent wherever it occurs. All who serve and sacrifice for our great nation deserve equal treatment and protection. Findings made in this work by Yale Veterans Legal Services Clinic, and the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress, demand immediate attention.”

“Since our nation’s founding, our government has relied on Black Americans to win its wars,” said Richard Brookshire, co-founder of Black Veterans Project. “Yet for decades, it has allowed racially discriminatory practices to obstruct Black veterans from equally accessing veterans’ housing, education and healthcare benefits — with wide-reaching economic consequences for Black veterans and their families. This lawsuit reckons with a shameful history of racism by the Department of Veterans Affairs and seeks redress for long-standing impropriety and inaction reverberating across generations of Black military service.”

Mr. Monk’s lawsuit, filed under the Federal Tort Claims Act, could provide a legal pathway for Black veterans to seek reparations from the VA. “This lawsuit seeks to hold the VA accountable for years of discriminatory conduct,” said Adam Henderson, a Law Student Intern with the Yale Law School Veterans Legal Services Clinic. Henderson also noted, “VA leaders knew, or should have known, that they were administering benefits in a discriminatory manner, yet they failed to address this unlawful bias. Mr. Monk—and thousands of Black veterans like him—deserve redress for the harms caused by these negligently administered programs.”

The National Veterans Council for Legal Redress (NVCLR), co-founded by Mr. Monk, is a Connecticut-based non-profit veterans service organization that engages in advocacy and public education to promote the respect and acceptance of all who served our country, and works to secure benefits for veterans and their families.

Black Veterans Project (BVP) advances research and public education to address long-standing racial inequities across the military and veteran landscape. BVP is a subsidiary of the Black Veterans Empowerment Council (BVEC) — a coalition of national, state and local veteran organizations seeking to shift long-standing racial, economic and social inequalities suffered by Black veterans in the United States.

The Veterans Legal Services Clinic, which represents Mr. Monk, is part of the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization at Yale Law School.
