



Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

Office of the Secretary

LARRY HOGAN
GOVERNOR

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
LT. GOVERNOR

GEORGE W. OWINGS III
SECRETARY

4 March 2021

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

The Honorable Shane Pendergrass, Chair
Members of the Health & Government Operations Committee

RE: SB 303/ HB 586 – General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Tuskegee Airmen
Commemoration Day

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committees,

Please be advised the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs supports SB 303/ HB 586 General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day.

As you know, this piece of legislation, which will establish a Commemoration Day, recognizes the brave Airmen, also known as “Red Tails” due to the distinguishing paint on the tails of their aircraft. This all African American unit was established and fought courageously in World War II. The experiments performed on them by the VA after they returned home as heroes, is a stain on our nation’s history and is a discussion for another day.

You may question why a Commemoration Day for a Unit formed in Alabama is important to Maryland. Foremost, Brigadier General Charles McGee, one of the last surviving original Tuskegee Airmen is a Maryland resident. General McGee celebrated his 101st birthday on December 7, 2020. There were more Tuskegee Airmen living in Maryland, but time is taking its toll on their ranks.

Also, the East Coast Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen has an active Youth in Aviation program teaching high school students who are interested in aviation based near Joint Base Andrews in Prince Georges County. Maryland Veterans Commissioner Franklin Killebrew introduced me to this program and the work they do to encourage future aviators. This program takes Maryland students from Ground School to actual flight training and prepares them for a career in the military or civilian aviation field.

It is certainly time to formally recognize the Tuskegee Airmen by establishing this special day. I urge a favorable position on this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Owings III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

George W. Owings III
Secretary