



**Statement of A. Donald McEachin
before the
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties
of the
Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives
Concerning H.R. 558 AND H.R. 899
June 20, 2007**

Chairman Conyers and members of the House Judiciary Committee, I want to thank you for your invitation to appear before the Committee today. I also want to thank Congressman Scott and Congressman Davis for sponsoring these bills which attempt to redress the discrimination that African American Farmers have suffered because of discriminatory practices on the part of the United States Department of Agriculture. I also want to thank John Boyd who is here today. I thank him for his persistence in keeping this matter in front of the Congress as well as keeping the African American farmers of this country informed, organized and energized on this issue.

As this Committee is aware, from the testimony it heard on September 28, 2004, U.S. farm services programs date back to the 1860s. History has shown these programs to be riddled with discriminatory practices. While the Federal Government has stepped up its programs to farmers in recognition of the growing capital needs of farmers, African American farmers have been largely left out due to discrimination and neglect.

At the turn of the 20th Century there were a million African American owned farms comprising some 16 million acres. Today there are less than 18,000 such farms comprising some 3 million acres.

At its September 28, 2004 hearing this Committee learned there are approximately 73,000 late filers to the original Pickford settlement process. Last summer my law partner traveled to a number of States with John Boyd. We saw first hand the plight of these farmers. We saw the desperation in their eyes. On a daily basis we get calls from these farmers asking about the status of these bills. Many of these farmers are fighting to keep their farms out of foreclosure. We learned, as you did in 2004, that many of these farmers simply did not get the message concerning the Pickford settlement in a timely manner. Although the original litigation attempted to mete out some measure of justice for the plight of the African American farmer, in the end, it failed to do so. To quote my Congressman, Congressman Scott: "I am concerned about the adequacy of [a]...process that leaves 70 percent of its claimants without a determination on the merits of their claim. I am not willing to accept that nearly 66,000 individuals who believe they have legitimate claims of racial discrimination knowingly ignored notice of the initial filing deadline and chose to submit their claims after the deadline for no good reason. I don't know what percentage of the claimants can show entitlement to relief, but it is certain some can."

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your time and I am happy to try to answer any questions that you or the members may have.