

September 28, 2010

United States Senate
Washington DC, 20510

Re: Legislation to Fund Black Farmer Settlement (*Pigford*)

Dear Senator:

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights (Lawyers' Committee) urges the Senate to support legislation to fund the black farmer settlement in *Pigford v. Vilsack* before adjourning for the Mid-term Elections. The Lawyers' Committee has played an active role in seeking redress for African American farmers discriminated against by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for years. In an effort to achieve equity for the farmers, the Lawyers' Committee objected to the original payment procedure in the *Pigford* case as inadequate and deficient, noting that potentially thousands of eligible Black farmers would be erroneously excluded from payment. Since that time, the Lawyers' Committee has insisted that the USDA comply with the court-ordered settlement and extend benefits to those excluded.

Sadly, it has been years since the *Pigford* case was filed, yet the settlement agreement has not been met by the federal government. Congress can no longer delay, nor can it turn into a partisan issue such a clear example of fairness for black farmers. Not funding this settlement could effectively amount to many of these plaintiffs losing their land or never receiving any justice from this federal government. That is simply unconscionable.

The United States will cease being a global leader if discriminatory policies persist in its own institutions. It is important that the Department, under Secretary Vilsack's vow for stronger leadership, be at the forefront of remedying past discriminatory practices. The Senate agreeing to distribute funding under the Obama Administration's additional settlement of \$1.25 billion dollars goes a long way to supporting the renewed commitment to turning the page on civil rights issues of the past. We know that the USDA's Office of Civil Rights has been working hard to counter the bad history of the USDA with minority farmers, and Congress needs to support this effort through continued funding of its financial obligations.

Many minority and women farmers depend on the USDA to obtain adequate capital to farm. As a result, bridging the gap between minority

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communities and the Department remains of utmost importance going forward. The House of Representatives has passed this measure. It is now time for Senate action so that black farmers have access to the justice from which they have been so unfairly denied.

Sincerely,



Barbara Arnwine
Executive Director



Tanya Clay House
Director of Public Policy

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