

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to respectfully urge you to award African-American journalist Simeon Booker the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his pioneering achievements in the field of journalism. Often referred to as the “Dean of the Black Press,” Mr. Booker blazed a trail for future generations of black journalists as well as social and political commentators of all races. His dedication to reporting during the Civil Rights Movement makes him a giant of the era.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, and raised in Youngstown, Ohio, Mr. Booker began his journalism career publishing articles about Negro Baseball League games in his hometown newspaper. As a reporter for the *Baltimore Afro-American* and the *Cleveland Call and Post*, he became the first African American to win the Newspaper Award for his series on slum housing in Cleveland, Ohio, and a Willkie Award for his reporting on racial inequities in public schools. In 1950, Mr. Booker was awarded the Nieman Fellowship from Harvard University to further develop his talents, and later became the first African-American reporter at *The Washington Post*.

Early in his career, Mr. Booker stood on the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, advancing the cause of civil rights through his reporting. In 1955, his coverage of the Emmett Till murder and trial helped turn a local event into a national tragedy. In 1957, he covered the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1961, Mr. Booker was the only journalist to accompany the Freedom Riders on their interstate bus ride through the segregated South. When the Freedom Riders were ambushed, firebombed, and beaten by the Ku Klux Klan, he helped arrange for their air rescue by calling U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

As a reporter for *EBONY* and *JET* magazines, Mr. Booker traveled twice to Vietnam to interview black soldiers on the front lines, collecting firsthand accounts of the racial turmoil within the newly-integrated U.S. military. The threat of violence was constant, and on one occasion he took enemy fire while interviewing U.S. Army General William Westmoreland aboard a helicopter. Despite the dangers, Mr. Booker’s commitment to documenting African-American casualties and the experience of black servicemen in the Vietnam War never wavered.

Over the course of his career, Mr. Booker interviewed presidents, members of Congress, the judiciary, Cabinet officials, and foreign ambassadors. He authored two highly-acclaimed books, *Shocking the Conscience: A Reporter’s Account of the Civil Rights Movement* and *Black Man’s*

America. Until he retired from Johnson Publishing in 2007, he covered every presidential election since 1952.

Mr. Booker is the first African American to receive the National Press Club's Fourth Estate Award, one of the most prestigious awards in journalism. Other honors and awards include president of the Capitol Press Club, 1956; induction into the Hall of Fame of Washington, D.C., 1984; Master Communicators Award, National Black Media Coalition, 1998; Phoenix Award, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, 2010; and induction into the Hall of Fame, National Association of Black Journalists, 2013.

For more than 60 years, Simeon Booker dedicated his life to chronicling the struggle for freedom and equality in the face of violence and oppression. His work reflects a rich tradition of black journalists in the mid-twentieth century that covered the stories that the mainstream media largely ignored. We urge you to recognize his fearless commitment to being a voice for the voiceless and his distinguished career in journalism by bestowing upon him our country's highest civilian honor.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator



Rob Portman
U.S. Senator



Barbara Mikulski
U.S. Senator



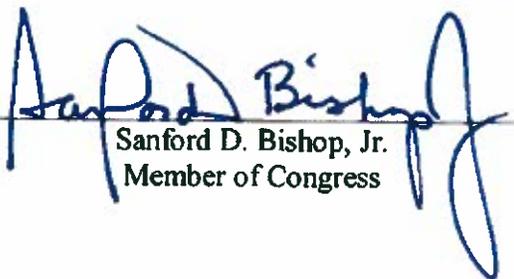
Ben Cardin
U.S. Senator



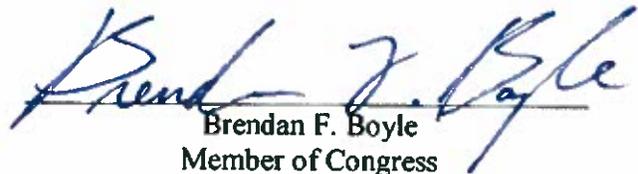
Tim Ryan
Member of Congress



Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress



Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress



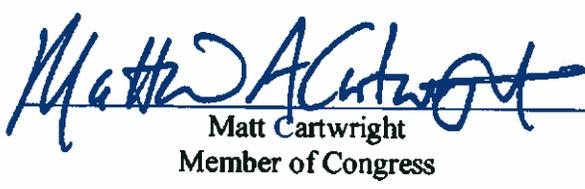
Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



G.K. Butterfield
Member of Congress



Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress



Matt Cartwright
Member of Congress



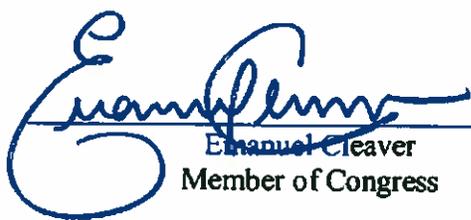
Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Elijah Cummings
Member of Congress



Michael F. Doyle
Member of Congress



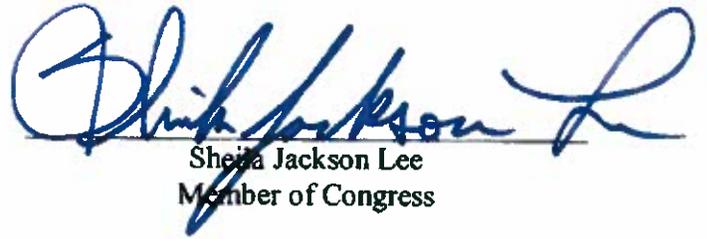
Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress



Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress



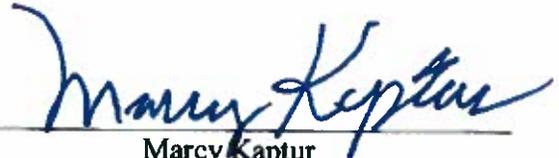
Brian Higgins
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Hakeem S. Jeffries
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



John B. Larson
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress



Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Cedric L. Richmond
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

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Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Chris Van Hollen in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Peter Welch in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Peter Welch
Member of Congress