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The Jackson Sun

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State Rep's law firm sues TN

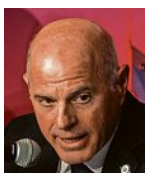
Lawmaker says housing agency discriminated against White people

Evan Mealins
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

A Republican state lawmaker's firm is arguing Tennessee's COVID-19-era mortgage assistance program discriminated against White homeowners and is seeking compensation.

The program, called the Tennessee Homeowner Assistance Fund, ended in 2025. The Tennessee Housing Development Agency prioritized giving funds to low-income and "socially disadvantaged individuals," which the agency defined in part as members of a minority race or ethnicity.

"THDA used the term 'socially disadvantaged individual' as a proxy for non-White homeowners, and it prioritized aid to those 'socially disadvantaged individuals' over White homeowners," the lawsuit says.


Bulso

The suit comes from Franklin Republican Rep. Gino Bulso's law firm.

It was filed in U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee on July 1 by Paul Krog of the Bulso Firm and four attorneys from Lehotsky Cohn, a Washington, D.C. boutique law firm. The lawsuit is against THDA, its executive director Ralph Perrey and its board of directors.

The named plaintiff in the case is Norlin Jones, a White homeowner in Jackson who struggled to pay his mortgage after his hours were cut at a manufacturing plant during the pandemic, the lawsuit says. Jones never heard about the program because THDA marketed it primarily to members of groups that have

See LAWSUIT, Page 2A

Safety issues beset Silicon Valley defense startup

Drone crashes, complaints mount as Shield AI courts military contracts

David Jeans REUTERS

NEW YORK –

A year ago, Ryan Tseng, the head of U.S. defense tech startup Shield AI, announced his company had turned a new page. ● After a gory incident that partially severed a U.S. Navy official's fingers during a test of its V-BAT drone, Shield AI had addressed safety concerns with new landing gear and warning stickers near the propeller. "(The) aircraft is, tip to tail, just a radically better airplane," Tseng told Forbes last year. ● Now it's happened again. ● A Romanian Navy official's hand was caught in a V-BAT propeller on May 12 during a Shield AI training exercise on a boat off the Texas coast – severing two of her fingers and fracturing a third, a spokesperson for Romania's Ministry of National Defense told Reuters.

The incident, which has not previously been reported, comes as Shield AI struggles to overcome years of technical hitches and safety concerns with its V-BAT, according to interviews with 21 former employees, industry executives and investors, and a Reuters review of a whistleblower complaint, a lawsuit related to hostile work environments and company presentations.

Reuters found that the V-BAT has crashed more than 50 times over the past 18 months, that several staff who raised safety concerns were dismissed and that a Cessna plane with a Shield AI employee and his child aboard had to take evasive action to avoid a mid-air collision with a V-BAT.

Shield AI also allegedly obscured technical flaws with its V-BAT, which costs about $1 million, to help land military sales, according to a previously unreported whistleblower complaint filed in May to the Department of Labor's Office of Administrative Law Judges and reviewed by Reuters.

Shield AI acquired the V-BAT, a vertical takeoff and landing unmanned aircraft designed for military uses, when it bought Martin UAV in 2021.

See STARTUP, Page 3A

A South Korean Navy V-BAT unmanned aerial vehicle takes part in a fleet review to mark the 80th anniversary of the navy's founding, in the waters off Busan, South Korea, in 2025. V-BAT maker Shield AI has seen meteoric growth, including V-BAT sales to more than half a dozen foreign militaries, but the startup's drone has struggled with persistent behind-the-scenes failures.
KIM HONG-JI/REUTERS

ABOVE: Visitors look at Shield AI's V-BAT unmanned aerial vehicle on display in Taipei, Taiwan, in 2025. Reuters found that the V-BAT has crashed more than 50 times over the past 18 months, and several staff who raised safety concerns were dismissed.
ANN WANG/REUTERS

23 more TN sheriffs make deals with ICE

New state law puts their funding at stake

Vivian Jones
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Sheriff's departments in Tennessee have formed at least 23 new partnerships with U.S. Immigration and Customs enforcement since a new state law forced county sheriffs to cooperate with ICE or forfeit state funding. Another six city police departments have signed agreements as well.

Immigration enforcement is the jurisdiction of the federal government. Collaborating with federal law enforcement through an ICE 287(g) partnership allows ICE to delegate some immigration enforcement to local law enforcement agencies.

State lawmakers passed a law this spring, written in collaboration with the Trump White House, that requires county sheriffs to participate in the 287(g) program. Historically, participation has been optional. Many states have no 287(g) partnerships at all.

Last year, lawmakers created financial incentives for counties to engage in 287(g) agreements, but more than half of Tennessee's counties chose not to participate. As of Jan. 1, 40 of Tennessee's 95 counties had agreements with ICE.

Bill sponsor Rep. Johnny Garrett, R-Goodlettsville, framed local sheriffs' lack of collaboration with ICE as breaking the law.

See ICE, Page 2A

Federal agents walk ahead of a bus at the Department of Homeland Security field office in Nashville on May 4, 2025.
NICOLE HESTER / THE TENNESSEAN

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