



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor

Ralph S. Northam
Governor

October 19, 2020

Mr. John W. Boland
President, Board of Visitors
Virginia Military Institute
Lexington, Virginia 24450

Dear Mr. Boland and members of the VMI Board of Visitors:

We write to express our deep concerns about the clear and appalling culture of ongoing structural racism at the Virginia Military Institute.

As the nation's oldest state-run military college, the Institute exalts the virtues of honor, sacrifice, dignity, and service—but it is clear these values do not extend to all students. Black cadets at VMI have long faced repeated instances of racism on campus, including horrifying new revelations of threats about lynching, vicious attacks on social media, and even a professor who spoke fondly of her family's history in the Ku Klux Klan—to say nothing of inconsistent application of the Institute's Honor Code. In addition, VMI cadets continue to be educated in a physical environment that honors the Confederacy and celebrates an inaccurate and dangerous “Lost Cause” version of Virginia's history. It is long past time to consign these relics to the dustbin of history.

This culture is unacceptable for any Virginia institution in the 21st century, especially one funded by taxpayers. Virginians expect all universities—and particularly public universities established by the General Assembly—to be welcoming and inclusive, and to eschew outdated traditions that glamorize a history rooted in rebellion against the United States.

As the Institute's governing board, you bear the ultimate authority for immediately addressing these concerns, but it is clear that internal action alone is no longer sufficient for VMI to join in the commitment to diversity and equity that the rest of Virginia's government is embracing. For these reasons, we are taking the following actions:

- We are directing an independent, third-party review of VMI's culture, policies, practices, and equity in disciplinary procedures. We intend to retain a non-partisan national organization to conduct this review, benchmark the Institute's culture against other universities, and report directly to us. We will ask for preliminary results by year-end in order to allow for any necessary legislative action in the 2021 session of the General Assembly.

- The Governor will propose to amend the budget to fund this review, and legislative leaders will support the measure.
- The Commonwealth’s Chief Diversity Officer and Secretary of Education will meet with the Board to review best practices around campus culture, to discuss funding implications, and to provide support on implementing a diversity plan that goes beyond the existing “Vision 2039” framework. They will meet with you no fewer than three times by year’s end, in advance of funding decisions for the 2021 General Assembly session, and they will reiterate the clear expectation of the Executive and Legislative branches that the culture of VMI will change.

We need to be clear that we strongly support VMI’s “mission of producing leaders — educated men and women of unimpeachable character and absolute integrity.” But these latest allegations suggest that VMI leaders are not moving fast enough or embracing the fundamental commitment to diversity that Americans expect from every institution in the 21st century.

We are committed to the sustainability of the Virginia Military Institute and its mission of educating citizen soldiers, but the future will look much different from the past. We are eager to work with you to accelerate the pace of change at the Institute, and new forward-looking members will continue to be appointed to the Board of Visitors.

We look forward to your immediate response.

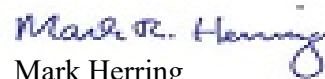
Sincerely,



Ralph S. Northam
Governor
VMI Class of 1981
Former President of VMI
Honor Court



Justin Fairfax
Lt. Governor



Mark Herring
Attorney General



Eileen Filler-Corn
Speaker of the House



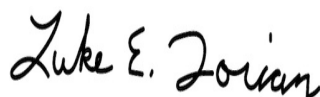
Louise Lucas
Senate President
pro tempore



Lamont Bagby
Chair, Legislative
Black Caucus




Janet Howell
Chair, Senate Finance
& Appropriations Committee



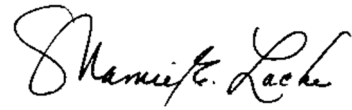
Luke Torian
Chair, House Appropriations
Committee



Richard L. Saslaw
Senate Majority Leader



Charniele D. Herring
House Majority Leader



Mamie E. Locke
Chair, Senate
Democratic Caucus

- C: Members of the Board of Visitors
 General J.H. Binford Peay III
 The Honorable Dr. Janice Underwood, Chief Diversity Officer
 The Honorable Atif Qarni, Secretary of Education
 The Honorable Aubrey L. Layne, Jr., Secretary of Finance