

# L. Douglas Wilder

June 8, 2021

THE Honorable Ralph S. Northam  
The Honorable Lt. Governor Justin Fairfax  
The Honorable Senator Janet Howell  
The Honorable Senator Tommy Norment  
The Honorable Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn  
The Honorable Delegate Luke Torian  
The Honorable Delegate Todd Gilbert  
The Honorable Delegate Lamont Bagby

## **Re: Funding for HBCUs**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We bring to your attention the long-standing denial of educational opportunities to African American citizens of the Commonwealth.

We are urging this Special Session of the General Assembly to allocate funds from the American Rescue Plan Act to rectify underfunding of Virginia's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) – Norfolk State, Virginia State, Hampton University, and Virginia Union.

Virginia practiced racial segregation, including in education, until it was deemed unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954. Instead of compliance, Virginia sought to circumvent the will of the Court when it instituted Massive Resistance.

The responsibility of educating Black students in higher education was left to the HBCUs, public and private. This system of government, almost exclusively "White", comprised with graduates of the "White" institutions, provided significant state tax dollars to those institutions, while consistently ignoring and underfunding the HBCUs, perpetuating separate and unequal educational opportunities. Notwithstanding, the Commonwealth's deliberate denial, Virginia's HBCUs have produced a disproportionate number of Black graduates and have provided educational opportunities for Blacks and low-income students at a far higher rate than other Virginia public and private institutions. This point was recently documented in a report released by Education Reform Now (ERN), which found that "while 34% of Virginia's 18-24-year-olds are Black or Hispanic, only three of the State's 15 public four-year institutions meet or exceed that proportion (two of which are HBCUs)."

Virginia's dismal record is underlined when students who are eligible for Pell Grants (the metric used to determine "low income" students who warrant Federal financial aid to attend college) are included in the analysis. According to the ERN report, "Virginia accounts for **one-third of the 15 worst public colleges and universities in the country** when it comes to working class and low-income student enrollment." No reason, legitimate or otherwise, has been made public for this situation to continue or to be tolerated, especially when Virginia purports to be invested in preparing every student to participate in its future workforce to fill the high demand for jobs needed to expand Virginia's economy.

P. O. Box 1345

Richmond, Virginia 23218

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In determining how to allocate Virginia's share of the \$11 billion in federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, the General Assembly must take long overdue steps to fully support its HBCUs. In addition, the General Assembly must maximize access to higher education for every Virginia student, including those traditionally denied access such as Blacks, Hispanics, and low-income Pell eligible students.

The Governor and General Assembly have the responsibility to immediately provide Virginia's four HBCUs with significant and ongoing funding. This commitment should include initial grants of \$50 million to each HBCU for scholarships, recruitment, retention, academic programs, and capital projects as provided to non-HBCUs.

Moreover, at a minimum to address the discriminatory findings of the ERN report, the General Assembly must provide additional financial incentives and a long-term commitment to its public and private HBCUs of at least \$1,500-\$2,000 for financial aid and TAG grants for each Pell eligible student they enroll, an incentive which should also be provided to each Virginia public and private institution to grow the enrollment of low-income students.

This is the time for leadership by the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Virginia business community, so that every student has an equal opportunity to achieve the American Dream, thereby, becoming a tax-paying contributor to Virginia's economy and improving our quality of life. The General Assembly found a way to act quickly when it wanted to institute Massive Resistance, a policy that can only be described as morally repugnant. It must now give meaning to its words to correct the inadequacies of its past and to provide hope for the future of all Virginians.

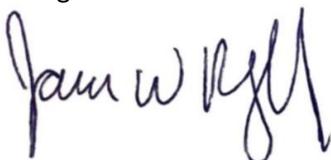
As participant in the rewriting of Virginia's constitution in 1971 and witness thereto, equality was the hallmark of that venture, and we feel there is nothing prohibitive of the request herein made under the Virginia law and constitution.

A timely response is requested and appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Douglas Wilder". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

L. Douglas Wilder

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James W. Dyke, Jr.". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a prominent "J" and "D".

James W. Dyke, Jr.