SUPERINTENDENT
VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

September 1, 2026

The Honorable Abigail Spanberger
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Gov. Spanberger:

I am pleased to provide VMI's third quarterly report on the positive progress the Institute has made with respect to diversity and inclusion efforts since the Commonwealth's 2021 audit.

Highlights of the report include:

- Matriculation of the largest class in VMI history (532 matriculants) including 82 females, the third largest cohort ever.
- Receipt of a $50,000 grant from the Jessie Ball duPont Fund to advance VMI's Inclusive History Project researching the people and communities whose contributions to VMI have not always been fully represented.
- Appointment of an ad hoc Board of Visitors committee to audit Institute actions following the 2021 Barnes & Thornburg report in compliance with HB1377.
- Recommendations from a workgroup comprised of VMI alumni to memorialize the first classes of African American cadets and female cadets.
- Execution of the "On Winning" symposium designed as a deep-dive into all facets of VMI's athletic programs in order to build a stronger culture and improve performance within athletics and among the Corps.

If I can answer any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. We are looking forward to hosting you on post in October along with legislative leaders from around the commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Lieutenant General David J. Furness '87
United States Marine Corps (retired)
16th VMI Superintendent

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Equity Audit Implementation Update
Quarterly Progress Report
September 1, 2026

The following is a summary of actions taken between June 1 and August 31, 2026, to foster, promote, and provide a diverse, inclusive environment for VMI cadets, faculty, staff, and visitors. (Actions / activities correspond to the areas defined in the June 2021 Barnes & Thornburg report.)

1. Maintain Accountability

- VMI evaluated proposals and selected a vendor for an organizational assessment and leadership development work. The assessment will look at VMI's organizational culture, including what is working well, where there may be friction, and factors affecting cadet and employee experiences.

- The Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion held a two-day workshop for the cadet peer facilitators who will lead the 2026-2027 Inclusive Excellence program activities. Cadets practiced facilitation skills, talked through how to manage difficult conversations, and reviewed the curriculum. Their feedback directly shaped this year's programming.

  The curriculum includes two new activities, "Core + Corps" and "Call It," along with an updated version of "Four Corners." This year's theme is "Building Belonging: Different Perspectives. Shared Purpose."

- The Board of Visitors president appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on HB 1377 to audit actions taken by the leadership of VMI following the release of the 2021 Barnes & Thornburg report, analyze admissions data since 2021 to determine if VMI has been successful in recruiting more diverse cadets, provide recommendations for VMI to implement, and suggest legislation to better meet the education needs of the Commonwealth.

  Members of the committee include Tom Williamson '72 (co-chair), Nancy Phillips (co-chair), Daryl Deke '82, Yolanda Green, Lester Johnson '95, and Elise Woodworth '07.

2. Improve Diversity in Leadership and the Corps

- 532 individuals matriculated as cadets on Aug. 18, the largest matriculation class in VMI history. The class includes:
    - 82 females (third largest cohort ever)
    - 24% non-white matriculants
    - 9 foreign countries represented (Canada, Ethiopia, Greece, Lithuania, Mexico, Portugal, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand)
    - 37 states represented plus Guam

3. Monitor and Adjust Institutions and Traditions

- VMI's Chief Diversity Officer gave presentations to the cadre, cadet government, and returning first, second, and third class cadets about their role in preserving and shaping Corps culture. The conversations focused on buy-in, the difference between compliance and commitment, informal norms, positive mentorship, and the responsibility to prevent harmful treatment from passing onto the next class simply because earlier classes had experienced it. Cadets were asked to think about which traditions build discipline and cohesion and how their own behavior affects whether those traditions are experienced as intended. The main message was that examining a tradition is not synonymous with rejecting it. Cadets are not only recipients of VMI culture. They are stakeholders who must decide what they will model, reinforce, take seriously, and carry forward.

4. Temper Associations Between VMI and the Civil War and Confederacy

- VMI received a $50,000 grant from the Jessie Ball duPont Fund for an Inclusive History Project after a competitive application and interview process. The award follows more than two years of work getting the Inclusive History Project off the ground. The grant will support undergraduate research into people and communities whose contributions to VMI have not always been fully represented. The first areas of focus include enslaved and free Black individuals connected to the Institute and VMI's historical relationship with surrounding Black communities. Later phases may examine indentured Irish laborers involved in VMI's early construction, the evolving role of women at the Institute, and other parts of its history.

- A workgroup comprising VMI alumni, staff, and historians have recommended a series of commemorations and concepts to memorialize the first African-American matriculants, the first class of female cadets, an enslaved ancestors memorial, and civil rights martyr Jonathan Daniels '61.

5. Actively Address Racist, Sexist, and Other Unacceptable Language and Behavior

- The presentations to the cadre, cadet government, and returning Corps directly addressed racist, sexist, and other unacceptable language meant as humor and informal language. Cadets discussed how humor can build camaraderie but can also send an implicit message about which people or groups are not respected or valued.

  Cadets were asked to think not only about what they intend, but also about what their words, laughter, and reactions reinforce within a group. The new "Call It" activity will continue this conversation during the 2026-2027 Inclusive Excellence program by asking cadets to work through how they respond when conduct falls short of Corps standards.

6. Encourage Reporting and Transparency

- The VMI Title IX office led the summer and back-to-school education on reporting processes and available resources. Title IX representatives spoke to the cadre and all four cadet classes including incoming first-year cadets. They explained how cadets can report concerns, where they can go for help, and what resources are available.

  The Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion office reinforced that message by encouraging cadets to raise concerns before they become larger problems. The presentations to cadets also addressed the importance of not confusing the person who brings forward a concern as being part of the problem.

7. Recognize and Celebrate Other Cultures

- The Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion spent the summer planning cultural education and community-engagement programming for the 2026-2027 academic year. Plans include heritage education, community service, cross-cultural programming, and partnerships with cadet and community organizations. The office's first event of the academic year will be a Latin dance night in celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month.

- The VMI superintendent, LtGen David Furness, traveled to Taiwan and Thailand during the month of July to strengthen and possibly increase the existing partnership / exchange between VMI and the two nations. VMI has benefited for more than 100 years from the partnership with Taiwan and Thailand that brings diversity and cultural awareness from having Thai and Taiwanese cadets as four-year members of the Corps. LtGen Furness visited with government and military leaders, secondary schools, and

well-connected VMI alumni to promote an increase in the number of students sent to VMI.

8. Address Tensions Between Athletes and Non-Athletes

- Building on the warm-up event mentioned in the June 1 report, VMI held a three-day "On Winning" symposium in early June. The symposium was a deep-dive into all facets of VMI's NCAA athletic programs with the purpose of removing barriers to success across the cadet experience to make all VMI's athletic programs more competitive. The symposium brought speakers to post to talk about how VMI can strengthen athletics, improve performance, and build a stronger team culture. The Chief Diversity Officer was one among many presenters and delivered a presentation on inclusion to the athletic department, commandant's staff, and select faculty.

  A major part of the discussion focused on better integrating athletics into the broader VMI experience and bridging the divide between athletes and non-athletes. A key takeaway included athletics should not operate as a parallel experience, but as part of the same leadership laboratory and Corps culture that define VMI.