SUPERINTENDENT
VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

February 27, 2026

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

Dear Gov. Spanberger:

I am pleased to resume reporting on the positive progress Virginia Military Institute has made with respect to diversity and inclusion efforts since the Commonwealth's 2021 audit. Enclosed is the first such report. We look forward to working with you and others as we continue our efforts to provide a safe, inclusive environment at VMI.

The attached report provides a snapshot of ongoing efforts to implement the audit's 38 recommendations, 37 of which are completed, in-progress, or ongoing. Highlights include:

- An Inclusive Excellence program designed to teach cadets how to be leaders of diverse individuals;
- A broadened new cadet recruiting strategy resulted in an increase of cadets of color by 7.1% and underrepresented cadets by 13.9%;
- An increase in faculty of color of 16% since 2021;
- A revised Honor Court Standard Operating Procedure that expands the likelihood of diversity among juries and provides a higher standard necessary for guilty verdicts;
- Removal of references to Stonewall Jackson from Memorial Hall and the barracks; and
- Adoption and modification of the 2021 Army regulations on grooming providing more flexibility for female and Black hairstyles.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our progress on these important issues. You are most welcome to come to Lexington at any time to see for yourself the exciting things that are happening at the Institute. If I can answer any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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
February 27, 2026

On June 1, 2021, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia released a final report of a state-ordered review of Virginia Military Institute's culture, policies, procedures, and discipline. The report's recommendations include the requirement for quarterly reports on diversity, opportunity, and inclusion efforts and progress toward audit recommendations. The Institute filed reports covering the period from June 2021 through April 2022.

A letter received from Gov. Spanberger dated February 18, 2026, has directed VMI to resume providing regular updates to "ensure transparency and to shape a shared understanding of the Institute's... commitment to continuous progress."

Of the 42 recommendations outlined in the June 2021 report, VMI is responsible for implementation of 38 recommendations. Four recommendations resided at the state level or with the VMI Alumni Agencies, a separate 501(c)3 organization, and are beyond VMI's authority to implement. Thirty-seven of the actionable recommendations have been completed, are in progress, or ongoing. The recommendations sort themselves into eight distinct areas: 1. Maintain accountability; 2. Improve diversity in leadership and the Corps; 3. Monitor and adjust institutions and traditions; 4. Temper associations between VMI and the Civil War and Confederacy; 5. Actively address racist, sexist, and other unacceptable language and behavior; 6. Encourage reporting and transparency; 7. Recognize and celebrate other cultures; and 8. Address tensions between athletes and non-athletes.

The following is a summary of actions taken since 2021, challenges encountered, and ongoing efforts to continue to provide a safe, inclusive environment at VMI.

1. Maintain Accountability

VMI's comprehensive DEI strategic plan, "VMI Inclusive Excellence, One Virginia," was published in August 2021. Among other initiatives, the plan outlined goals to include achieving and maintaining a more diverse Corps of Cadets, faculty, and staff, as well as exposing varied perspectives of domestic and international diversity and inclusion into the VMI community.

VMI organized the Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion in 2021. This office has remained staffed and functioning under the original organizational structure. The chief diversity officer is a member of the superintendent's special staff and reports directly to the chief of staff providing guidance to Institute leadership on issues affecting inclusivity at VMI.

Key accomplishments:

- Annual Inclusive Excellence training conducted for cadets by academic cohort.
- Annual Inclusive Excellence training conducted for faculty, staff, and administrators.

In-progress and/or ongoing initiatives:

- Annual Inclusive Excellence training for cadets, faculty, staff, and administrators.
- Annual training for the Board of Visitors is scheduled for April 2026.

Needs improvement / challenges:

- The VMI Inclusive Excellence strategic plan was last updated in 2021. The next update awaits action on the Institute's overall strategic plan. All departments, including the Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion office, will address their strategic plans once the Institute's revised strategic plan is complete.

2. <u>Improve Diversity in Leadership and the Corps</u>

Since 2021, VMI broadened its overall new cadet recruiting strategy by expanding outreach, marketing efforts, and partnerships in strategic markets to include JROTC, military high schools, and areas surrounding military bases. By engaging with a wider range of schools and student populations that possess an interest in leadership and military service, VMI has expanded the pipeline of prospective cadets to include a more geographically and demographically representative cohort.

Additionally, VMI's Office of Human Resources has focused on hiring, pay equity, and recruitment practices.

Key accomplishments:

- Since 2021, the percentage of cadets of color has risen from 23.8% (394 cadets) to 30.9% (463 cadets) of the Corps.
- Underrepresented cadets, as defined by SCHEV, have increased by 13.9% since 2021.
- Female enrollment has increased 1.8% since 2021, and 2024 marked the second largest matriculation class of females in VMI's co-ed history.
- For the 2025-2026 academic year, 52% of the most senior cadet leadership positions are cadets of color or female up from 29% in 2021-2022.
    - 2021-2022 saw the first female regimental commander in the history of VMI.
    - Three of the past five regimental commanders have been cadets of color or women.
    - Five of the past six battalion commanders have been female.
- Since 2021, diversity within the faculty has increased.
    - Faculty of color has increased 16% since 2021.
    - VMI now has four female academic department heads (one in 2021).

  - Five of 13 academic support unit directors are female (three of 11 in 2021).
- An Employee Compensation Committee recommended and VMI adopted models for teaching / research and administrative faculty that are market-based, insulated from bias using large industrywide databases to compare median salary for each role.
- Invested nearly $1.2 million to increase minimum hourly pay for full-time employees to $15 per hour, adjusted classified employees for salary compression, and increased remaining classified employee salaries based on comparison of salary to statewide average for respective DHRM role codes.
- Since 2021, a Faculty Advisory Committee with direct reporting to the deputy superintendent for academics and dean of the faculty has been created. The FAC is included in all read ahead materials of the Academic Board and is on each Academic Board meeting agenda to present a report and respond to questions.

In-progress and/or ongoing initiatives:

- Targeted recruitment outreach in diverse professional and trade journals for vacant faculty / staff positions.
- VMI has implemented diversity training into its new employee orientation process.

Needs improvement / challenges:

- Monitoring public statistical information on diversity efforts is a challenge under the current federal guidance on diversity.
- Network of diversity officers for Virginia public institutions of higher education has been paused since March 2025, shortly after the U.S. Department of Education's "Dear Colleague" letter.
- Federal statute and legal case law prevents race-based financial aid.

3. <u>Monitor and adjust institutions and traditions</u>

There is no more important institution or tradition at VMI than the Honor Code. A diverse group of cadets, faculty, staff, and alumni met throughout 2021 – 2022 to review and revise the Honor Court Standard Operating Procedures to ensure the process was fair for the accused and involved more cadets in the adjudication process.

Key accomplishments:

- Honor Court Standard Operating Procedures were revised and implemented in August 2022.
  - The revised SOP now provides a list of pro-bono attorneys to all accused cadets. The list is maintained by the superintendent representatives to the Honor Court.
  - Jury pool selected at random increased from 24 to 36 cadets.

  - The cadet jury increased from 8 to 12 (11 voting members, 1 alternate).
  - Prospective jurors cannot be removed through the voir dire process without cause (no preemptive strikes).
  - Guilty verdict requires 9 of 11 jurors (82%). Previously, 5 out of 7 jurors (71%) were required for a guilty verdict.
- Allows the superintendent to appoint non-Honor Court observers at a trial.
- Reports of sexual assault are investigated in accordance with General Order 16 through the Institute's Title IX officer. The Cadet Equity Association no longer conducts investigations.

In-progress and/or ongoing initiatives:

- Formal training and mentoring implemented for the Honor Court defense advocate.
- Honor System peer training for cadets now includes jury training.
- Data collection ongoing to support a root cause analysis to determine if the Honor System disproportionately affects certain demographic groups over others.
- Ongoing review of recruiting materials and procedures to ensure incoming cadets have an accurate understanding of the VMI experience.
- Onboarding process created enabling new coaches to better and more accurately communicate the VMI experience to prospective cadet-athletes.
- Honor Court training and education for every member of the Corps of Cadets throughout one's cadetship.

Needs improvement / challenges:

- Diversity, opportunity, and inclusion training for Honor Court members and defense advocates needs to be incorporated into current training efforts.

4. <u>Temper associations between VMI and the Civil War and Confederacy</u>

In 2021, the VMI Board of Visitors identified a list of 37 items associated with Confederate iconography across VMI post. These 37 items were reviewed by a diverse 12-person committee comprising board members, VMI cadets, faculty and staff, alumni, and a Civil War scholar from the University of Virginia. The iconography was reviewed by the committee using 2018 cultural heritage guidance issued by the federal government. The committee considered the original purpose of each item. If the item's original purpose was to venerate the Confederacy or slavery, the committee removed the item. However, if the item's purpose focused on the individual's contribution to VMI, and if the committee deemed that the contribution outweighed other compelling historical considerations, the item was retained. Notably, all references to Stonewall Jackson were removed from the former Jackson Memorial Hall as well as the Jackson Arch in barracks.

Key accomplishments:

- References to Stonewall Jackson on buildings were removed.
- VMI ended the practice of accepting contributions for academic awards sponsored by organizations associated with the Confederacy.

In-progress and/or ongoing initiatives:

- Superintendent meets with cadet leaders bi-weekly and will meet with the Promaji Club (VMI's multicultural student organization) bi-weekly as well.
- VMI cadets will participate in the Lexington Martin Luther King Jr. parade in 2027 complimenting existing faculty and staff participation.
- Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion co-sponsors cultural events on post and within the Lexington-Rockbridge community. Cadets are welcome to attend these events.

Needs improvement / challenges:

- Address remaining associations with organizations associated with the Confederacy that sponsor honorary academic chairs.
- The focal point of Memorial Hall is a 25-foot-tall mural of the Battle of New Market. Memorial Hall is a frequently used facility on post and serves as a gathering place for cadet meetings, speakers, and chapel services, among other events. According to a third-party art historian, the mural cannot be moved without destroying the artwork. In accordance with a recommendation from the Board of Visitors Commemorations, Memorials, and Naming Review Committee, VMI has installed signage to provide additional context to the artwork. Regardless, the mural remains a source of conflict for many cadets who encounter it on a daily basis. VMI's CDO recommended that a retractable curtain be installed to cover the mural when appropriate. The superintendent approved that recommendation.

5. <u>Actively address racist, sexist, and other unacceptable language and behavior</u>

VMI does not tolerate discriminatory language or behavior. The penalty under the VMI cadet regulations (Blue Book) for "disrespect to another cadet based on their membership in a protected class" includes dismissal at the discretion of the superintendent. Any allegation of discriminatory language or behavior is investigated and, when substantiated, is sent to the superintendent for final disposition. Any cadet who faces a substantiated accusation of "disrespect to another cadet based on a protected class" will appear before the superintendent for adjudication.

Key accomplishments:

- VMI revised its general order on discrimination and harassment. All reports of misconduct are forwarded to the Inspector General / Title IX Office and addressed in accordance with federal regulations, state law, and VMI policy, as applicable.
- Door locking policy was updated to allow cadets to lock their doors at any time.

In-progress or ongoing initiatives:

- A major upgrade to barracks doors and CCTV cameras is currently in progress with completion expected in the fall of 2026. The new door locking system and expanded use of CCTV cameras has the primary effect of strengthening safety and the secondary effect of enhancing compliance / enforcement.
- In-person Bystander Intervention Training is provided annually to all cadets. The Title IX office provides in-person, peer lead training during the spring of 4th Class (freshman) and spring of 3rd Class (sophomore) year. Refresher BIT is required for all 2nd Class (junior) and 1st Class (senior) cadets in an online format.
- VMI monitors all social media, and any reports of racism or sexism are reported to the Title IX Office or Public Safety for investigation and future adjudication by the appropriate authority.

Needs improvement / challenges:

- The anonymous social media app, Jodel, remains a challenge despite being banned on the state-owned network at VMI. Users can still access it through their cellular provider and post anonymous comments based on their location. Although there is a common understanding of how problematic the app can be, its continued use suggests the platform's anonymity and the administration's inability to curtail its use on personal cellular devices emboldens a small subset of individuals within the Corps to spread negative commentary about select persons and groups with near impunity.

6. <u>Encourage transparency and reporting</u>

VMI has offered many different avenues for reporting harassment and discrimination and has been compliant in this area for well over a decade. All VMI employees are designated as mandatory reporters with the exception of confidential resources (e.g. counseling, medical, and chaplain's staff). Each cadet company is assigned a Cadet Equity Association representative. The CEA is responsible for ensuring equitable opportunities for every cadet to learn and grow regardless of race, gender, or position of leadership or followership throughout the Corps of Cadets. Cadets can report misconduct to any member of the CEA, faculty, staff, or anonymously through the web. Those reports are fully investigated by the Title IX office and referred for adjudication by the superintendent when substantiated. Cadets can always report directly to the Title IX office.

Key accomplishments:

- The Title IX office created a new anonymous reporting form online that feeds directly into the office's case management system (Maxient). A link to the form is available online as well as via QR code on posters throughout post which are updated annually.

In-progress or ongoing initiatives:

- VMI Alumni Agencies is a separate, 501(c)3 organization with a governing board responsible for its own financial reporting. They provide annual reporting and are audited annually in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

Needs improvement / challenges:

- VMI offers many avenues for reporting harassment and discrimination. VMI is developing a concerted education campaign covering both our processes and reporting culture to inform cadets, faculty, and staff how to report misconduct and what actions to expect from the VMI post-report.

7. <u>Recognize and celebrate other cultures</u>

VMI possesses a wealth of diversity within the Corps of Cadets and in the surrounding community. Cadets are encouraged to take advantage of cultural events and programs. Resources and support are available to individuals and organizations with diverse needs through the Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion, as well as the VMI Chaplain's Office.

Key accomplishments:

- VMI adopted the revised Army grooming standards (Army Regulations 670-1) beginning in 2021-2022. These standards provided significant changes to address diversity and inclusion as well as more flexibility for female hairstyles. These standards as adopted in 2021 remained in effect.
- In 2024, VMI established a working group to better understand the requirements and identify and address any shortfalls in our ability to support all cadets' hair care needs. As a result of this working group, VMI modified the appearance and grooming standards utilizing significant portions of AR 670-1, Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia (January 26, 2021), allowing for braids, buns, ponytails, hair extensions, and natural colors.
- Other committee recommendations that were adopted or implemented include a remodeled barber shop with salon capabilities to provide expanded services to all cadets, simplified hair guidance for civilian hair stylists to ensure cadets meet VMI appearance standards, and a cadet barbershop advisory group that meets twice a semester to address any issues regarding hair standards and maintenance.

In-progress and/or ongoing initiatives:

- Inclusive Excellence training, required annually, focuses on training cadets to lead diverse groups of individuals.
- VMI's Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion, in conjunction with other clubs and organizations, coordinates and (co-)sponsors special events that raise awareness and celebrate racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. Such celebrations include academic presentations, social events, or special menus in Crozet Hall (mess hall). Examples over the past 12 months include:
    - Women's History Month movie night
    - International Day of Nowruz
    - Eid al-Fitr menu in Crozet
    - Clothesline Project (sexual assault awareness)
    - French-American heritage menu in Crozet
    - Oktoberfest menu in Crozet
    - Japanese tea ceremony
    - Native American heritage menu and trivia in Crozet
    - Holiday card making for veterans and seniors
    - Roots of Soul Black History Month menu in Crozet
    - Black History Month Pass the Mic Night
    - Mardi Gras menu in Crozet
- Cadets may submit permit requests to attend community events, e.g. MLK celebrations, PRIDE events, etc.

Need improvement / challenges:

- The superintendent has directed that VMI explore additional naming opportunities and memorials to highlight and recognize VMI's first Black and female cadets to attend the Institute.

8. <u>Address tensions between athletes and non-athletes</u>

VMI intends to remain in Division I athletics as it best aligns with the Institute's mission and the VMI experience at this time. Efforts are underway to lay the foundation for a winning program in all sports. VMI is currently evaluating changes to how it raises funds and evaluates potential coaches. The athletic department's revised strategic plan will also contribute to a significantly improved athletic culture that more closely aligns with cadet culture.

In-progress / ongoing initiatives:

- As the final revisions are being made to the Institute's strategic plan, efforts will turn toward the creation of a comprehensive athletics strategic plan that will support the Institute's overall plan and address points of friction between athletes and non-athletes.
- Onboarding for new coaches and athletic staff to better understand and be able to communicate the VMI experience to potential recruits and first-year cadets.
- By design, rat room assignments place at least one NCAA athlete into each room, and there are no rat rooms that exclusively house NCAA athletes. The staff encourages rat / dyke (senior mentor) relationships between athletes and non-athletes.
- Improved relationships and regular communication between the commandant and the athletic staff. Coaches now spend more time in barracks.

Needs improvement / challenges:

- The ongoing effort to more closely align athletic culture with the broader cadet culture is a deliberate, long-term undertaking. Athletics should not be a parallel enterprise, rather, it should be an extension of the same leadership laboratory that defines VMI. The attributes that define cadet life (i.e., discipline, sustained hard work, precision and attention to detail, resilience in the face of adversity, moral courage) are equally foundational to athletic excellence. Working toward this cultural alignment is the focus area for the summer of 2026 across the entire athletic enterprise to not only produce strong athletic teams, but stronger leaders and increased cohesion across the Corps of Cadets.