



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Glenn Youngkin
Governor

November 13, 2025

The Honorable Abigail Spanberger
Governor-elect
Commonwealth of Virginia
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor-elect Spanberger:

When we first met last week, I pledged to ensure that your transition as Governor-elect would not only be smooth, but that my Administration would do our part to ensure that you would be ready on your first day. We have been forthright with you and your team and made data and individual state officials available. In our private meeting in my office yesterday, we discussed a wide range of topics, including boards and university operations. You very briefly mentioned sending a letter about the University of Virginia (UVA), but moved to a different topic so quickly that it seemed unimportant at the time. It is disappointing to learn that just after our meeting started, your office shared this letter with the *New York Times* and other outlets. Whether done in error or in bad faith, I am compelled to address both the breach of protocol as well as the inaccuracies in your letter.

I am advised that this was likely the first time in the history of our Commonwealth that a Governor-elect attempted to interfere with the governance of a university and the fiduciary duties of individual board members. Surprisingly, you have reached conclusions before you or your transition team have taken the time to learn all the facts surrounding the resignation of former UVA President Jim Ryan and the settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

Your letter was riddled with hyperbole and factual errors and impugns both the Board of Visitors and the presidential search underway. I understand that this search has followed national best practices and been a model of transparency, including offering multiple opportunities for stakeholder input. The 28-person search committee met at four announced times in Charlottesville and has had dozens of listening sessions open to any who wished to be heard. Hundreds of comments, expectations and aspirations have been communicated by faculty and staff, students and alumni, community leaders and neighbors, and others. The Board has employed the same national executive search firm and process used to select former President Ryan. I also understand that many talented and innovative candidates for the position have applied from across the nation.

In addition, you challenged the Board's authority to choose a president and carry out its duties based on a statutory provision. That assertion is meritless and has been rejected by the Court of Appeals of Virginia.

Furthermore, you criticized the University's agreement with the DOJ here and elsewhere. Again, had you waited until your transition team had the opportunity to learn all the facts behind this settlement, I believe you would agree with the many national experts who view it as extraordinarily fair and favorable to the University and Commonwealth. Unlike other universities such as Columbia, Brown, and Cornell, the University will not be required to pay tens of millions of dollars as a penalty nor be subject to a federal monitor. Equally important, the agreement suspended all federal investigations, did not recommend the suspension of any research or other federal grants and protects academic freedom.

Make no mistake, the DOJ did not randomly or without a predicate select UVA when it started its formal investigation. The evidence is compelling that the University had repeatedly ignored the law. Former President Ryan made his intentions clear about not being committed to follow federal law, in letters and several speeches, including one to the faculty. In a moment of transparency, the former University counsel during former President Ryan's tenure confirmed in a public speech that the University "had some programs that crossed the legal line...we have, in certain schools or certain departments, numerical formulas and that was against the rules."

It is also important to correct your mistaken belief about former President Ryan's resignation and dispel continuing and intentional misinformation. I have no desire to disparage Jim and have intentionally not addressed this issue previously. Over the past three years, I have worked with Jim on a variety of initiatives and have acknowledged that he accomplished much during his tenure and truly loved the University. I have been thoroughly briefed and it's clear that neither DOJ nor the current Board leadership made Jim resign. His resignation took place under the leadership of Rector Robert Hardie, who was appointed by Governors Kaine, McAuliffe and Northam, and his resignation was encouraged personally by former Rector Rusty Conner, who was the rector during Jim's hiring. I have been advised that they persuaded former President Ryan to advance his previously planned resignation by several months because they believed he could not fully implement what they assumed would be included in the settlement agreement.

By acting precipitously, you may have inflicted significant damage on the university you profess to love. As two predecessors, Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, stated, "Decisions about UVA's leadership belong solely to its Board of Visitors." Governors manage higher education institutions through the budget process and by appointments to their governing boards. Throughout my term, I have worked hard to ensure that they are indeed free of political interference and are safe environments for learning, and appointed individuals with extraordinary skills, competence, and experience necessary to manage our incredible higher education institutions. I hope you too will take that to heart.

It's dangerous to wrongfully disparage committed individuals who volunteer to serve on university boards and the serious work they do. Further, the Governor of the Commonwealth should speak thoughtfully and honor the service of those individuals. My guidance to the UVA Board is to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities, take advantage of the most inclusive and successful presidential search process in UVA's history and not waste the great pool of candidates by unnecessarily delaying the search and losing them to other schools.

Lastly, the Virginia Code allows for a transition period so that the incoming chief executive can be as prepared as possible and that the outgoing Administration can wrap up and transfer ongoing initiatives. As was wisely communicated to me by my predecessors, there is just one Governor of Virginia at any time. This ensures that the Commonwealth's operations continue unimpeded. Communicating with state agencies or boards of visitors is confusing and is inconsistent with proven, professional protocols. And certainly, efforts to bully or micromanage are inappropriate. Your Administration will start on January 17, 2026. Until then, as I have told you, we will work closely and productively with your transition. If you wish to communicate ideas or seek information with officials in state government, your team knows the process to do so.

It's regretful that I must communicate to you in this manner, but your correspondence left no other choice.

Sincerely,



Glenn Youngkin

cc: Rector Rachel W. Sheridan
Vice Rector Porter N. Wilkinson
Members, UVA Board of Visitors