



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

HOUSE OF DELEGATES

RICHMOND

C. TODD GILBERT
SPEAKER

SPEAKER'S ROOM
STATE CAPITOL

POST OFFICE BOX 406
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23218

FIFTEENTH DISTRICT

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
RULES (CHAIR)

May 4, 2023

Mr. Hal E. Greer, Executive Director
Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission
919 E. Main Street
Suite 2101
Richmond, VA 23220

VIA E-MAIL

RE: Request to Study Cost Efficiency of Public Institutions of Higher Education

Dear Mr. Greer,

During the 2023 General Assembly Session, the House Rules Committee considered H.J. 541 (Delegate Byron), which would have directed the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Commission (JLARC) to study the growing cost of public higher education in the Commonwealth. In lieu of formal passage, the Rules Committee's Studies Subcommittee agreed that this letter would be sent to JLARC, requesting that it study this proposal.

As you know, JLARC previously studied this issue and produced a report in November 2014 entitled, "Addressing the Cost of Public Higher Education in Virginia." It is unclear which, if any, of the 16 recommendations have been adopted from this report published nearly a decade ago. However, it is clear the costs to attend Virginia's institutions of higher education have continued to increase and the tuition and fees are some of the highest in the nation, despite significant recent general fund investments. JLARC's 2022 State Spending Report also noted that "[t]he largest uses of tax-supported debt over the past decade were for higher education capital projects and teaching and research equipment."¹

Additionally, a recent article in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* noted the looming enrollment crisis at some institutions as well as the impact a dwindling eligible student population has on the system of higher education collectively.² There have also been anecdotal reports from institutions across the Commonwealth about the increasing number of non-instructional or administrative staff, particularly in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) positions. One such report stated that approximately 1,100 in-state students could receive a full-tuition scholarship

¹ JLARC, *State Spending: 2022 Update*, at 10.

² See Eric Kolenich, *Are Va's Big Colleges Driving Small Ones Out of Business*, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Apr. 8, 2023.

for the amount spent on DEI salaries.³ Finally, multiple pieces of legislation have been introduced in the House of Delegates over the last decade to reform various areas within higher education ranging from admissions policies, public comment, curricular and instructional requirements, transparency and reporting requirements, among others.

Given these issues, we respectfully request that JLARC study the cost efficiency of public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth and identify opportunities to reduce costs as outlined in this strongly bipartisan resolution. An updated study and recommendations from JLARC will provide policy and budgetary leaders in the General Assembly with much needed information as we consider how to address the looming challenges presented in higher education.

Sincerely,



C. Todd Gilbert
Speaker of the House



Terry G. Kilgore
House Majority Leader

C: The Honorable Janet D. Howell, Chair
The Honorable Robert D. Orrock, Sr., Vice-Chair
The Honorable Terry L. Austin
The Honorable Kathy J. Byron
The Honorable Betsy B. Carr
The Honorable Barry D. Knight
The Honorable Kenneth R. Plum
The Honorable Luke E. Torian
The Honorable R. Lee Ware
The Honorable Tony O. Wilt
The Honorable Mamie E. Locke
The Honorable Jeremy S. McPike
The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr.
The Honorable Lionell Spruill, Sr.
The Honorable Staci A. Henshaw, Auditor of Public Accounts
The Honorable Aimee R. Guidera, Secretary of Education

³ See Virginia Association of Scholars, *Should Virginians Pay for University “Diversity” Leftism*, 2022, at 6.