

Dr. Paula Pando  
President  
J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

Victim Impact Statement  
July 19, 2022

Ms. Keisha Lashawn-Pope's tenure at Reynolds Community College predated my time as president, but the adverse impact of her criminal acts have been fully felt during the entirety of my nearly four years at Reynolds. The impact has been experienced primarily in three broad categories:

**Diverting Critical Resources:**

Over 60% of our approximately 13,000 students rely on financial assistance annually to pay for their college education. The application process can be confusing and often requires a great deal of individualized attention, guidance, and follow-up from our financial aid staff.

To fully comply with the federal investigation into the criminal activities of Ms. Pope, student financial aid officers hired in 2018 (after Ms. Pope separated from the college) and other members of the college staff spent over 1,000 hours over the course of four years cooperating with this ongoing investigation. This includes participating in multiple interviews (and follow up interviews), gathering, organizing, and submitting countless documents and documentation to investigators, written statements, testifying in court, etc. In short, this time was diverted from providing some of our most in-need students the guidance and support they needed to make appropriate financial decisions about attending college. The cost is truly incalculable.

**Reputation of the Institution:**

The coverage of Ms. Pope's crimes has cost the college greatly in terms of public reputation. Our integrity has been questioned by donors, board members, community members, and students. Shortly after the news broke, I was participating on a panel of educators in Powhatan County when I was asked publicly if our director of financial aid would be held responsible for stealing tax-payer dollars. It was embarrassing and took away from the discussion about plans and programming that would be transformational for our service region. Instead, I found myself explain that the activity occurred before my watch, and that there was an entirely different administration that was making sure controls were in place to prevent fraud in the future. This would not be the only time I would be questioned publicly about Ms. Pope's activities.

Additionally, community colleges rely heavily on philanthropic investment to innovate and support students. Reynolds is no different. While we can quantify the number of questions we have had to field since the news broke, what we cannot truly quantify are opportunities where we were passed over for investment due to the news coverage of Ms. Pope's actions, attributing her criminal acts during her tenure at Reynolds Community College. Foundation



board members wanted to be assured that controls were in place to protect the dollars they raised and donated from being misused. Indeed, we fully anticipate another round of questions and potentially adverse impact once this sentencing trial concludes, and the results of which are covered in the press.

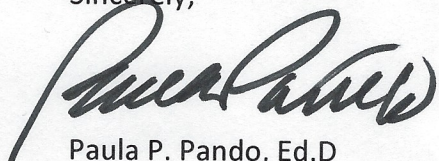
**Reputation and Demoralization of our Financial Aid Staff:**

I can confidently state that our Financial Aid Director, and former Assistant Director, are some of the most highly respected professionals in the Commonwealth of Virginia. They are highly credentialed leaders in this space, experienced, and holding statewide officer positions (including past president of the Virginia Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators). This leadership team was not at the college during the time of the criminal activity taking place. They were hired to strengthen the financial aid operations, put controls in place, and provide students with the highest quality of service and support. They were successful in these pursuits, despite the countless hours spent, and related stress that comes with complying with a federal investigation.

When the news broke, all eyes were on them. Multiple calls were received from parents, students and stakeholders questioning the integrity of our team of financial aid professionals. Needless to say, the morale of this team suffered greatly. Demoralized, embarrassed, and forced to explain that they were not involved, hoping their integrity would not continue to be questioned, character maligned, reputations damaged.

In closing, the government assessed Ms. Pope's misappropriation of funds to be in the amount of approximately \$230,000.00. The fiscal damages to the college were assessed at approximately \$82,000.00 (loss of tuition differential and COMA grants). What cannot be assessed, however, is the damage that has been done to the college's reputation, the extent of the deterioration of the public's trust, and the professional and personal harm inflicted upon our team of professionals. These are arguably the heaviest costs we have paid, and will continue to pay in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paula Pando", written in a cursive style.

Paula P. Pando, Ed.D