

For Immediate Release:

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Virginia Black Politicos

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**Virginia Black Politicos, Black Elected Officials, and Black Community Leaders
Statement in Regards to Statewide Elected Officials**

Richmond, VA – Governor Northam and Attorney General Herring,

We have all watched with astonishment and grave disappointment as the integrity of our state was compromised as you both admitted to participating in blackface on at least one occasion. As you are now aware, blackface was a derogatory and racist practice of white performers some 200 years ago used to mock enslaved Africans during minstrel shows. It was, has, and will always be offensive. The revelations of your actions cut deep.

In 1619, the first enslaved Africans were brought to present day Virginia. As Governor Northam incorrectly stated to CBS' Gayle King on February 10th, 2019, these were not "indentured servants," rather they were enslaved people and their arrival marked the beginning of slavery in what would come to be known as America. As we enter into the 11th day of

Black History Month, you continue to remind us that Virginia's politicians still have an incredibly long way to go in understanding the constituency they serve. While we continue to believe neither of you can continue to effectively serve in the executive branch of our great Commonwealth, you have stated that you do not intend to resign. Many have called for reconciliation, conversations, and healing. We, are calling for all of the above, and more; it is not enough for you to simply apologize, so we are requesting your resignations and for the following steps be taken in light of recent events:

1. We are calling for mandatory meetings with Governor Northam, Attorney General Herring, African-American and Indigenous stakeholders from across the Commonwealth of Virginia. African-Americans across this Commonwealth have been hurt by both racist gestures, such as blackface, and racist policies that disproportionately impact our communities, as well as Indigenous and communities of color. It is not fair for either the Governor or Attorney General to be able to tell us how they are sorry, set their own stage for what they will do, nor is it wise to pretend as if this will simply blow over.
2. We are requesting that Governor Northam create a Business Equity Fund to help boost and support minority owned businesses with an emphasis on African-American owned businesses in the Commonwealth. Economics are at the forefront of many of the issues within Virginia. The wealth disparities, which are derivatives of slavery, are generationally detrimental to African-Americans and

communities of color in comparison to White counterparts. This must change, and the Governor must assist with this effort.

3. We are calling for Governor Northam to state emphatically that all confederate statues and memorials should be removed from public spaces throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia and encourage state wide lawmakers to grant localities the ability to decide the fate of the statues in their local public spaces.
4. We request the creation of an Office or Division of Equity and Inclusion to assist the Governor with matters specifically pertaining to African-Americans, Indigenous, and people of color. It has become blatantly obvious that the Governor is oblivious and rather reluctant to address issues concerning race, and he is not fully aware of complex and nuanced issues facing communities of color. He must create a division within his cabinet to address these issues, and help solve the many problems facing the commonwealth
5. We are calling for mandatory meetings with Attorney General Mark Herring and African American stakeholders from across the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Attorney General's office is the top law office in the Commonwealth; the place that has disproportionately criminalized, incarcerated and dehumanized African-Americans and communities of color for generations. In an effort to put actions behind your public apology, we are demanding that the Attorney General publicly call for the following:
 - a. Decriminalization of Marijuana throughout the Commonwealth
 - b. The immediate removal of all Confederate Statues and Monuments

- c. Commit to ensuring that at least 25% of his staff are people of color
 - d. Create an Office or Division of Equity and Inclusion to help assist the Attorney General with matters specifically pertaining to African Americans, Indigenous and people of color.
- 6. We underscore and endorse the request of Brown Virginia's call for the creation of a Governor's Commission on African-American Families. The purpose of the commission will be to advise the Governor and General Assembly, as well as work directly with State agencies, to improve and expand existing policies, services, programs, and opportunities for African-American families in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- 7. We are calling for Governor Northam to provide tangible solutions with his public apology. Currently, there are five Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the Commonwealth of Virginia:
 - a. Virginia State University
 - b. Norfolk State University
 - c. Hampton University
 - d. Virginia Union University
 - e. Virginia University of Lynchburg

In an effort to make amends for his actions, we are requesting Governor Northam to prioritize these institutions in his budget and increase their funding. In addition to this, we are calling on Governor Northam to lead a capital campaign in which each institution receives five million dollars. Governor Northam spent over \$36 million while running for his current seat - a seat he would not have won without the support of African-Americans in the Commonwealth.

There can be no reconciliation or healing without a reallocation and/or redistribution of resources to our communities.

8. Further, we co-sign the following demands authored by a coalition of organized Virginians working united against white supremacy through unraveling the Capital of the Confederacy. These demands target policy decisions that impact African Americans, Indigenous communities, communities of color, and women, as well as other vulnerable populations.
 - i. Establish a new renewable energy agency, fully funded by the commonwealth, for the use and benefit of all Virginia residents
 - ii. Appropriate state funds toward coastal residents - not corporations - facing increasing hardships due to climate change
 - iii. Ratify the Equal Rights Amendment
 - iv. Reinstate and effectively implement parole in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
 - v. Exercise executive power to grant mass clemency to as many pending cases as possible with an emphasis on freeing incarcerated Black people while restoring the rights taken through incarceration
 - xii. Strike proposed budget measures that increase harm to youth of color, such as funding for school resources officers.

- xiii. Dedicated implementation of a universal representation program in the state budget to grant immigrant and refugee communities access to immigration litigation.

We also acknowledge the seriousness of the matter with our Lieutenant Governor, Justin Fairfax. Allegations of sexual assault are to be viewed and received with the utmost respect. Our thoughts and prayers are with Dr. Tyson as well as Meredith Watson. Mr. Fairfax as well as many others have called for a full investigation into this matter, and we are joining that list. If Mr. Fairfax is guilty of any of the allegations made against him, he needs to resign from his position immediately.

Wednesday February 13th at 5:30 PM we welcome every African-American elected official, leader, and community stakeholder to support African-American leaders boycotting the annual Black History Month reception at the Governor's Mansion. We will continue to stand united against racism and white supremacist values in our elected leadership.

Opposed to having his annual Black History Month reception, it is our desire that Governor Northam will listen to and respond to our demands. Again, there can be no reconciliation without acknowledgement, reallocation and redistribution of resources, and a commitment to change.

In Solidarity,

Virginia Black Politicos and Friends

Virginia Black Politicos Executive Committee

Dr. Wes Bellamy, Charlottesville, VA

Shemicia Bowen, Richmond, VA

Jennifer Bowles, Martinsville, VA

Joe Dillard, Norfolk, VA

Taikein Cooper, Prince Edward County, VA

Jewell Jordan, Portsmouth VA

114 Black Elected Officials and Community Leaders from Virginia

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