

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

March 5, 2026

The President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Pete Hegseth  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. President and Secretary Hegseth:

We write to you regarding urgent matters affecting the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), a federally recognized Senior Military College (SMC), whose governance, statutory structure, and officer-producing mission are currently subject to significant state legislative intervention that sets a dangerous precedent of State over-reach. As documented in the Stand Together Against Racism and Radicalism in the Services (STARRS) Open Letter to the President and the Alumni Free Speech Alliance (AFSA) Resolution, these actions raise serious concerns regarding federal military authority, officer commissioning pipelines, and compliance with federal constitutional and statutory requirements.

VMI operates pursuant to Title 10 of the United States Code as one of only six federally recognized Senior Military Colleges. Congress has expressly recognized and supported such institutions because of their importance to national defense and officer procurement. As noted in the STARRS letter, VMI's cadets participate in ROTC programs under federal authority and commission at rates that exceed most civilian institutions. Any restructuring that materially alters governance, oversight, or commissioning integrity directly implicates federal reliance interests protected under 10 U.S.C. § 2111a.

**Importantly, the implications of the pending Virginia legislation extend far beyond a single institution.** If a state legislature may unilaterally restructure, politically condition, or subject a federally recognized Senior Military College to recurring review of its military mission, that precedent could apply equally to every SMC operating under Title 10. Such actions risk weakening the uniform federal framework that governs officer development across multiple states and institutions.

This is a truly bipartisan issue. The SMC designation under Title 10 U.S.C. establishes a nationally integrated officer-production model. ROTC detachments at SMCs operate under federal authority and produce commissioned officers for all branches of the Armed Forces. The federal government relies upon the institutional stability, governance continuity, and military

culture of these colleges to maintain predictable commissioning pipelines. A destabilizing precedent in one state could invite similar legislative restructuring elsewhere, introducing fragmentation into what Congress designed as a coherent national system.

Two bills advancing in the Virginia General Assembly — HB1374 and HB1377 — collectively restructure the governance of VMI and establish a legislative task force empowered to examine, evaluate, and potentially recommend changes to its military training model, governance framework, and officer-producing role. As detailed in the STARRS analysis, HB1374 alters the composition of the VMI Board of Visitors by capping alumni representation or eliminating it entirely. It also significantly reshapes the appointment criteria from that which served the Institute for over 187 years. HB1377 establishes a task force authorized to study VMI's educational and institutional practices, including its military training and commissioning function.

The AFSA Resolution affirms that unilateral state restructuring of a federally recognized SMC may implicate the Supremacy Clause and interfere with federal authority over officer standards, readiness, and commissioning integrity. It further calls upon the Secretary of Defense to assess whether HB1374 and HB1377 threaten the integrity of VMI's federal mission. This sets a precedent where by any political party can unilaterally replace or diminish the role and authority of Congress or any President.

Beyond VMI itself, the following national implications warrant immediate federal review:

- **Impact on All Senior Military Colleges Under Title 10 U.S.C.**  
If state-level political restructuring becomes normalized, every SMC could face legislative alteration of governance, military standards, or commissioning priorities. This would undermine Congress's intent to create a stable, federally recognized officer-development framework.
- **ROTC Pipeline Integrity Across States**  
ROTC commissioning pipelines are nationally integrated, not state-specific. Cadets educated in one state commission into federal service for the benefit of all states. Legislative instability at SMCs risks recruiting declines, donor uncertainty, faculty attrition, and reduced cadet morale — all of which directly affect commissioning output.
- **Military Readiness and National Defense**  
At a time of documented recruiting shortfalls and increased operational demands, any disruption to officer production has cascading effects on force structure, leadership development, and readiness. The Armed Forces rely on predictable commissioning flows. Introducing political contingency into SMC governance could reduce commissioning reliability nationwide.
- **Federal Supremacy and Uniform Standards**  
Title 10 contemplates uniform federal authority over officer development. Allowing individual states to incrementally redefine or condition the military character of SMCs risks creating uneven standards and fragmentation in officer training across jurisdictions.

As Congress has previously required comprehensive interagency data and review when military readiness concerns arise — including in prior inquiries regarding blast trauma and suicide —

similar federal diligence is warranted here. The structural integrity of the officer pipeline is no less vital to national defense than force health protection.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that you provide the following information and undertake the following actions:

1. **National-Level Assessment of Senior Military College Stability**  
Conduct a Department-wide review to determine whether state legislative restructuring at VMI establishes a precedent that could affect all Senior Military Colleges operating under Title 10 U.S.C.
2. **ROTC Commissioning Impact Analysis**  
Provide a formal assessment of how governance instability at any SMC could affect ROTC recruitment, retention, commissioning rates, and officer accession planning across all services.
3. **Federal Preemption and Supremacy Review**  
Determine whether HB1374 and HB1377, individually or collectively, materially interfere with federal prerogatives under Title 10 or compromise the nationally integrated officer-production framework.
4. **Readiness and Force-Structure Implications**  
Evaluate the potential downstream effects on officer availability, leadership development timelines, and national defense readiness if SMC commissioning capacity were diminished or destabilized.
5. **Interagency Civil Rights and Funding Compliance Review**  
Coordinate with the Departments of Justice and Education to ensure that governance changes do not conflict with federal civil rights obligations or federal funding conditions, as raised in the AFSA Resolution.
6. **Monitoring Framework for All SMCs**  
Consider implementing a monitoring and reporting mechanism applicable to all federally recognized Senior Military Colleges to ensure continued compliance with Title 10 purposes and preservation of commissioning integrity nationwide.
7. **Monitoring any Virginia Task Force Established for VMI.**  
Direct at least one (preferably two) representatives from the Department of Defense serve on any Task force and considering appointing a Special Advisor to the President from STARRS and AFSA nominees to be full participants in any Task Force with the requirement for periodic reports from these federal participants to the House Armed Services Committee and the Office of the President.

VMI has served the Nation for more than 180 years, producing officers who defend all fifty states. The issue before you is not confined to Virginia; it concerns the stability of a federally recognized officer-development system upon which the entire Nation depends.

State authority over public institutions must operate in harmony with federal supremacy in matters of national defense. We respectfully urge your prompt review of this matter to ensure that the Title 10 Senior Military College framework, ROTC commissioning pipelines, and national military readiness remain secure, uniform, and insulated from destabilizing political restructuring.

Thank you for your attention to this matter of national consequence. We stand ready to assist in any way that may support your review.

Respectfully,



Ben Cline  
Member of Congress



Robert Wittman  
Member of Congress



H. Morgan Griffith  
Member of Congress



Jen A. Kiggans  
Member of Congress



John J. McGuire III  
Member of Congress

cc:

Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Chairman and Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee

Chairman and Ranking Member, House Armed Services Committee

Attorney General of the United States

Secretary of Education

Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia