



# VCU Annual Report pursuant to § 23.1-401.1. Constitutionally protected speech; policies, materials, and reports; report

December 1, 2025

## Overview

Virginia Commonwealth University is committed to creating an environment that fosters the exercise of protected speech and other expressive activity on university property while maintaining an atmosphere free of disruption to the mission of the university. It recognizes that the free expression of ideas and open inquiry are essential in fulfilling its academic mission by embracing rigorous open discourse, argumentation, speaking, listening, learning and the exploration of ideas. In support of maintaining such an environment, VCU incorporates and employs several policies and practices that protect free speech and support expressive activity in compliance with Va. Code § 23.1-401.1.

## Institutional Policies

These policies and related materials include the following:

- [Free Speech](#) at VCU
- [Campus Expression and Space Utilization Policy](#)
- [Reservation and Use of Space website](#)
- [Expression and Space Utilization FAQs](#)
- [Social Media Acceptable Use Policy](#) for social media account administrators (references, and links to, the First Amendment)
- [Interim Student Code of Conduct](#)

## Reporting Concerns

The university community is able to report concerns through two primary channels:

- Information on reporting concerns is referenced and linked on the [Free Speech](#) website.
- For concerns regarding students, reports can be made through [the VCU Helpline](#) [www.vcuhelpline.com] or direct to the Division of Student Affairs: <https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?VirginiaCommonwealthUniv>



## **Certification**

This certifies that the institution has developed and communicated the materials outlined herein, and [communication to the students has occurred](#). Additional messaging regarding expressive activity for this reporting period occurred to employees responsible for disciplining students, and this messaging is attached as Appendix A. Communication to all employees regarding expectations related to expressive activity exists through new hire onboarding, annual training, and in formal, university-wide policies readily available and accessible at <https://vcu.public.doctract.com>.

## **Complaints:**

Please find enclosed two complaints:

- L. Douglas Wilder v. Michael Rao and Suzanne Milton filed in the Eastern District of Virginia on August 1, 2025. The case was voluntarily dismissed by the plaintiff on October 7, 2025.
- Jesse D Pellow v. Virginia Commonwealth University, Office of Student Conduct. This case was filed on November 12, 2025, in Richmond City District Court and is pending.

**Reviewed and Certified by Jason A. Block, Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer.**



## Appendix A

Dear Students,

As you get settled into the fall semester, we want to share some information regarding expressive activity on campus. VCU is a very diverse community with a host of differing viewpoints reflecting each of our personal lenses through which we see, and experience, the world. This diversity of viewpoint and opinion is a tremendous asset to our community. Our hope is that you engage in conversations with others who share similar and dissimilar perspectives. In that regard, the university is committed to fostering a climate that encourages civil and spirited discourse.

VCU advocates for the dignity of all human beings. We understand that while creating an environment that supports civil dialogue, hurtful comments can be made by others. We are committed to creating a supportive culture for all our students while balancing First Amendment rights.

VCU is obligated, as a public university, to ensure a strong commitment to the First Amendment and Virginia law. The First Amendment prohibits prior restraint on speech and taking adverse action against individuals or groups, whether affiliated with the university or not, based on the viewpoints of their speech. This freedom of speech also encompasses the rights of those who present differing viewpoints.

The Expression and Space Utilization Policy Interim clarifies how expressive activities may occur at VCU. A list of Frequently Asked Questions can assist with inquiries that have been made previously, including but not limited to those pertaining to time, place, manner, costs, and major events. Additionally, here is a link to the Space Utilization Maps.

We also have a team of staff members through the Division of Student Affairs who are available to consult and are often present when expressive activities occur on campus. The Dean of Student Advocacy office is available throughout the year to meet with students who have specific questions or concerns and can be reached at [vcudean@vcu.edu](mailto:vcudean@vcu.edu) or 804-828-8940.



As a public university, we will uphold the constitutional rights of our community, and hold tight to our core values of decency, respect, diversity, and inclusion. We will foster an environment where all members of our community feel welcome, safe, supported, and able to succeed in the context of our mission.

Thank you for your support of expressive activity on our campus and your willingness to engage in productive civil discourse with others.

Sincerely,

Division of Student Affairs

# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Eastern District of Virginia



L. Douglas Wilder

*Plaintiff(s)*

v.

Michael Rao and Suzanne Milton

*Defendant(s)*

Civil Action No. 3:25-cv-00597-RCY

## SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: *(Defendant's name and address)*

MICHAEL RAO  
910 West Franklin Street  
Box 842512  
Richmond, VA 23284-2512

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

L. Douglas Wilder  
301 Va. Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

CLERK OF COURT



M. Fuks

Date: 08/01/2025

*Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk*

Civil Action No. 3:25-cv-00597-RCY

**PROOF OF SERVICE**

*(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (l))*

This summons for *(name of individual and title, if any)* \_\_\_\_\_  
was received by me on *(date)* \_\_\_\_\_.

☐ I personally served the summons on the individual at *(place)* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ on *(date)* \_\_\_\_\_; or

☐ I left the summons at the individual's residence or usual place of abode with *(name)* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, a person of suitable age and discretion who resides there,  
on *(date)* \_\_\_\_\_, and mailed a copy to the individual's last known address; or

☐ I served the summons on *(name of individual)* \_\_\_\_\_, who is  
designated by law to accept service of process on behalf of *(name of organization)* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ on *(date)* \_\_\_\_\_; or

☐ I returned the summons unexecuted because \_\_\_\_\_; or

☐ Other *(specify)*:

My fees are \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for travel and \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for services, for a total of \$ 0.00.

I declare under penalty of perjury that this information is true.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Server's signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Printed name and title*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Server's address*

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:

# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Eastern District of Virginia



L. Douglas Wilder

*Plaintiff(s)*

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Suzanne Milton  
910 West Franklin Street  
Box 842512  
Richmond, VA 23284-2512

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

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☐ I left the summons at the individual's residence or usual place of abode with *(name)* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, a person of suitable age and discretion who resides there,  
on *(date)* \_\_\_\_\_, and mailed a copy to the individual's last known address; or

☐ I served the summons on *(name of individual)* \_\_\_\_\_, who is  
designated by law to accept service of process on behalf of *(name of organization)* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ on *(date)* \_\_\_\_\_; or

☐ I returned the summons unexecuted because \_\_\_\_\_; or

☐ Other *(specify)*: \_\_\_\_\_

My fees are \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for travel and \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for services, for a total of \$ 0.00.

I declare under penalty of perjury that this information is true.

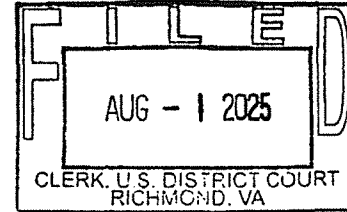
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Server's signature*

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*Printed name and title*

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*Server's address*

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:



**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA  
RICHMOND DIVISION**

L. DOUGLAS WILDER,

Plaintiff,

vs.

MICHAEL RAO, in his official and  
individual capacities as President of  
Virginia Commonwealth University,  
SUZANNE MILTON, in her official  
and individual capacities as Chief Audit  
and Compliance Executive at Virginia  
Commonwealth University,

Defendants.

Case No.: 3:25cv597

**COMPLAINT**

**JURY TRIAL DEMANDED**

1 Plaintiff, L. Douglas Wilder, former Governor of the Commonwealth of  
2 Virginia, distinguished professor, and namesake of the Wilder School of  
3 Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU),  
4 brings this civil action to challenge malicious, unsubstantiated, and retaliatory acts  
5 orchestrated by Defendants Michael Rao and Suzanne Milton under the guise of  
6 institutional compliance.

7 In March 2025, Defendants initiated a vague and procedurally deficient  
8 investigation of Plaintiff that has undermined his professional reputation and  
9 disrupted his longstanding public service.

10 This action arises under the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S.  
11 Constitution, Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act, and Virginia defamation  
12 law. Plaintiff seeks damages, injunctive relief, and declaratory relief for the  
13 constitutional and legal injuries inflicted upon him.

14  
15 **SUMMARY OF COMMUNICATIONS WITH DEFENDANT MILTON**

16 Between June 12 and June 19, 2025, Wilder received multiple emails from  
17 Suzanne Milton, Chief Audit and Compliance Executive at Virginia  
18 Commonwealth University, concerning a confidential investigation into alleged  
19 conduct at the Wilder School.

20 In her initial communications, Milton requested that Wilder participate in an  
21 interview with attorneys from the firm Husch Blackwell, indicating that the  
22 investigation involved allegations of a hostile work environment and other  
23 unspecified matters. Wilder responded by requesting clarification on the scope and  
24 purpose of the inquiry, a definition of a "hostile work environment"; and the  
25 specific allegations involved, as well as a copy of the complaint.

26 Milton refused to provide the complaint or identify the complainants.  
27  
28

1 Wilder reiterated his concerns regarding transparency, procedural fairness,  
2 and the chilling effects of initiating an investigation based on anonymous,  
3 unsubstantiated claims. He noted that none of the allegations had been  
4 corroborated and reminded Ms. Milton of his prior federal complaint against VCU,  
5 which resulted in settlement.

6 Throughout this communication, Wilder has maintained a professional and  
7 consistent request for transparency, accountability, and fairness in the process.  
8

### 9 CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

#### 10 COUNT I – First Amendment Retaliation (42 U.S.C. § 1983)

11 Defendants Rao and Milton, acting under color of state law, initiated and  
12 sustained baseless investigations of Plaintiff's conduct in retaliation for his  
13 protected speech and public criticism of VCU leadership.

14 Defendant Rao further instructed VCU officials, and other high-ranking  
15 individuals, not to engage with Plaintiff, thereby attempting to silence his voice  
16 within the institution, thereby retaliating against his advocacy.

17 These actions violated Plaintiff's First Amendment rights and caused  
18 substantial damage to his lifelong reputation, academic role, and public service  
19 legacy.

#### 20 COUNT II – Denial of Procedural Due Process (42 U.S.C. § 1983)

21 Defendant Milton, under Rao's direction, denied Plaintiff access to the  
22 complaint, refused to disclose the dates or details of the allegations, and conducted  
23 an investigatory process devoid of fairness required under the Fourteenth  
24 Amendment.

25 Plaintiff has been denied a meaningful opportunity to respond to  
26 accusations, violating clearly established due process rights.  
27

1                                    COUNT III – Defamation and Defamation Per Se

2            Defendants Rao and Milton made false statements concerning Plaintiff's  
3 conduct and character to countless others.

4            These statements accused Plaintiff of threatening conduct, abuse, and misuse  
5 of university resources — accusations that are provably false.

6            Such statements were made with malice, aforethought, and reckless  
7 disregard for truth and accuracy, and constitute defamation per se.

8                                    COUNT IV – Retaliation Under Title VI and Title VII

9            Plaintiff engaged in protected activity, including advocacy for equity and  
10 criticism of university leadership.

11           In retaliation, Defendants subjected Plaintiff to hostile and defamatory  
12 investigatory actions.

13           These actions violate the anti-retaliation provisions of Title VI and Title VII  
14 of the Civil Rights Act.

15  
16                                    **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

17           WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court:

- 18           a. Enter judgment in favor of Plaintiff on all claims;  
19           b. Declare that the actions of Defendants violated Plaintiff's constitutional and  
20 rights;  
21           c. Award compensatory and punitive damages in an amount to be determined;  
22           d. Award costs and attorneys' fees under 42 U.S.C. § 1988;  
23           e. Enter injunctive relief prohibiting further retaliation or defamatory actions  
24 against Plaintiff;  
25           f. Order Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) to retract any defamatory  
26 findings and restore Plaintiff's standing; and  
27

1 g. Grant such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.  
2

3 **JURY DEMAND**

4 Plaintiff demands a trial by jury on all issues so triable.  
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7 Dated: 8-1-25  
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DECLARATION OF L. DOUGLAS WILDER

I, L. Douglas Wilder, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, declare under penalty of perjury that the following is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. I am over the age of 18 and competent to testify to the matters stated herein.

2. I served as the 66th Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia and am the first elected African American governor in the United States.

3. I currently serve as a distinguished faculty member at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), which bears my name.

4. On Thursday, June 12, 2025, I received an email from Suzanne Milton, Chief Audit and Compliance Executive at VCU, stating that her office was conducting a "confidential investigation regarding allegations of a hostile work environment at the Wilder School and other matters".

5. On June 12, 2025, I also received a message from Lisa Parker, an attorney with the outside law firm Husch Blackwell, seeking to schedule an interview with me.

6. On June 12, 2025, Ms. Milton pressed me to schedule the interview within the same week, without having provided any clarity as to the scope of the allegations or the nature of the investigation.

7. On June 16, 2025, Ms. Milton responded by listing vague allegations — including that there was a threatening environment at the Wilder School, an abusive relationship with Dean Susan Gooden, that I threatened colleagues, misused university personnel, and was involved in Wilder School personnel decisions — without providing the complaint itself or any specific factual basis.

8. That same day, I also received a message from Lisa Parker, an attorney with the outside law firm Husch Blackwell, seeking to schedule an interview with me.

9. Later that day, Ms. Milton pressed me to schedule the interview within the same week, without having provided any clarity as to the scope of the allegations or the nature of the investigation.

10. On June 16, 2025, I sent an email requesting a written explanation of the inquiry's scope, the basis of the allegations, and the relevance of my involvement. I also informed Ms. Milton and Ms. Parker of my prior federal complaint against VCU for discrimination and retaliation which was settled with non-retaliatory conditions.

11. On June 16, 2025, Ms. Milton responded by listing vague allegations — including that I threatened colleagues and misused university personnel — without providing the complaint itself or any specific factual basis.

12. On June 17, 2025, I asked Ms. Milton to provide the date the complaint was received and a copy of the complaint.

13. On June 18, 2025, she denied my request, citing unspecified privacy concerns and stating there was no formal complaint because the matter did not involve discrimination.

14. On June 19, 2025, I clarified that I had not requested the identity of any complainant, only the substance and timing of the complaint, and reiterated my request for transparency.

15. Despite never receiving the complaint, I agreed to an interview with Lisa Parker and Ryan Spraker on June 20, 2025.

16. I have received no findings or facts from Ms. Milton.

17. The final report has not been shared with me.

19. President Rao has made malicious and retaliatory efforts to damage my reputation by instructing individuals, and high-ranking officials, not to engage with me in any context. These actions appear calculated to isolate me and undermine my professional and personal standing both within and beyond VCU.

20. President Rao's actions have not only undermined my ability to engage with the very institution that bears my name, but reflect abuse of his position and a disregard for academic freedom and respect.

21. I affirm that these retaliatory and defamatory actions have caused significant damage to my professional reputation, standing in the academic community, and emotional stability.

21. I affirm that these retaliatory and defamatory actions have caused significant damage to my professional reputation, standing in the academic community, and emotional stability.

I declare, under penalty of perjury, that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on: July 30, 2025

Richmond, Virginia

/s/ L. Douglas Wilder

L. Douglas Wilder

Plaintiff

Plaintiff  
301 Va. Street  
Richmond, 23219 VA

Richmond, 23219 VA

804-381-3483

CL25-5547-00

RBC

Jesse D Pellow

V

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Office of Student Conduct

Jesse D Pellow

900 Terminal Place #203

Richmond, VA 23220

[jdpagustine@gmail.com](mailto:jdpagustine@gmail.com)

570-295-5523

**IN THE RICHMOND CITY DISTRICT COURT**  
**NOTICE OF CIVIL COMPLAINT**

Virginia Commonwealth University

Office of Student Conduct/Kristie Filipchuk

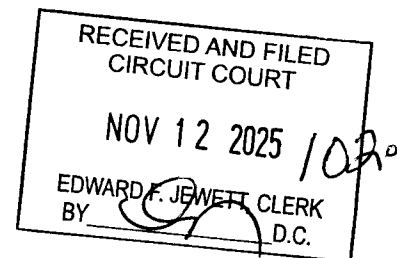
815 South Cathedral Pl

2nd Floor

Richmond, VA 23220

[stuconduct@vcu.edu](mailto:stuconduct@vcu.edu)

804-828-1963



## NOTICE OF CIVIL COMPLAINT

### Jurisdiction

This court has jurisdiction over this matter under VA Code 17.1-513.

The defendant, VCU, is an agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia under Title 23.1 Chapter 23 of the Code of Virginia.

Defendant, Kristie Filipchuk and the Office of Student Conduct are agents of Virginia Commonwealth University.

### Claims under Virginia Law

1. Virginia Law 23.1-401.1 protects free speech. VCU has violated this law in retaliation for protected free speech as plaintiff will show.
2. 8VAC20-671-620. Student Conduct. VCU has violated this law numerous times.
3. Virginia Law 40.1-33.6 Retaliatory Action Prohibited.
4. Virginia Law 18.2-417 Slander and Libel. This plaintiff has faced libel and slander from students at this University and from individuals not associated with the University.
5. Malice

### Brief Background of Complaint

This plaintiff was admitted to VCU in the Spring of 2025 for graduate studies in the master's program for the Department of History. During the summer of 2025 this plaintiff informed the Department Chair and Administrative Assistant of pending legal charges made against him by the District Attorney of Blair County Pennsylvania. The short story is that I was charged by Logan Township of two summary charges under Title 34 Section 2311. Title 34 is a hunting and gaming law in Pennsylvania. I don't own a gun nor do I hunt. I was renting a room in a home owned by an individual who owned a landlocked property with a private right of way driveway that was deemed as such by the Blair County Court of Common Pleas in 1981. I was thrown into a long running civil dispute between my landlady and her two neighbors. I am not harassing anyone; I'm not stalking anyone. I was driving in and out of my driveway to work and to class. I then get gang tackled by two Logan Township police officers who are privately paid by a non-profit organization called 'Operation Our Town'. This organization also illegally funds the DA. This has been going on since 2007. This organization is

trying to continue to retaliate against me by getting VCU to suspend me for actions that occurred before I was admitted to the University. The VCU Office of Student Conduct even tried to get me to quit before having a hearing. I have email evidence to show this. The reason they are trying to suspend me is because they claim I didn't meet with the Chairman of the Department after I informed them of these charges. There were scheduling conflicts, and he wanted to meet before classes started and that is why he is now angry. Apparently being Chairman is acting like a dictator and throwing students out because they just don't like them. Yes, that is how VCU operates. Communication between students and professors is a part of their job. I have sent emails to some VCU staff and professors that have gone unanswered. I have proof of this as well. Yet I was found guilty by the Office of Student Conduct for failing to meet with the Chairman before classes started. Were other students made to meet with the chairman? Or just me? Were other students found guilty or just me? The next hearing from VCU is December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

#### Injunction Sought

1. The plaintiff is seeking an injunction from the judge to halt all Student Conduct proceedings regarding the matter.
2. The plaintiff is seeking an independent investigation into the allegations that were made against me by the Chairman of the History Department at VCU and to a Dr. Charles Klink.
3. The plaintiff is seeking an investigation into the Actions of the Office of Student Conduct at VCU regarding this matter and whether any Virginia or Federal laws were violated.
4. The plaintiff is asking the court to order VCU to respond to any further communications from myself to staff or professors at VCU in a timely manner and whether not responding to email communications is a breach of contract.
5. The plaintiff is asking the court to order the Graduate advisor to work with this student in a professional manner.

Signed this Date



11/10/25

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## **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby do attest and affirm that a true and correct copy of this document has  
been sent to the following,

Virginia Commonwealth University

Office of Student Conduct

Kristie Filipchuk

815 S. Cathedral Pl

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

Richmond, VA 23220

[stuconduct@vcu.edu](mailto:stuconduct@vcu.edu)

Signed this Date

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jesse Pellow', with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.

Jesse Pellow, Pro Se

11/10/2025