

June 24, 2026

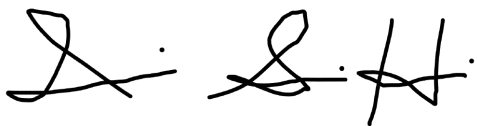
Dear Governor Spanberger and Members of the Virginia General Assembly,

Pursuant to Va Code § 2.2-602, I am writing on behalf of the Virginia Indigent Defense Commission (VIDC) to present our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Report for FY 2026 (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026). During FY 2026 the VIDC continued its commitment to fostering a workplace that values diversity, equity, inclusion, and opportunity. While we experienced a modest decline in overall racial and ethnic diversity compared with the prior reporting period, our long-term trend remains positive and our diversity in leadership roles continues to increase.

Our approach to diversity, equity and inclusion is holistic. Rather than isolated programs, DEI is woven into every facet of our organizational development strategy. We firmly believe that a workplace where all employees feel valued, respected and empowered to contribute their best will be more resilient, innovative and responsive to the Commonwealth's needs. This report highlights initiatives that have proven successful in promoting diversity and inclusion, outlines areas where we have faced challenges, and sets forth goals for the coming year.

We appreciate your continued support and look forward to discussing our DEI initiatives in more detail at your earliest convenience. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,



Amari Harris  
General Counsel and Director of Equity & Operations  
Virginia Indigent Defense Commission

cc: Dr. Seshu Jai Moon, Chief Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Officer

## **Affinity Groups**

Recognizing the importance of community and support networks, we launched eight affinity groups in 2020. These groups continue to foster connections, amplify voices and address the unique needs of our diverse workforce. They have been key drivers behind many initiatives and policy changes at the VIDC.

## **Recruiting and Onboarding**

Our recruiting and onboarding materials prominently feature our affinity groups, wellness resources and a comprehensive summary of employee benefits. We communicate to applicants and new hires that VIDC intentionally fosters community and initiatives to support sustained effectiveness and wellness in this work.

## **Hiring and Promotion**

To ensure fairness and competitiveness in our hiring and promotion processes, we have implemented revised policies that prioritize equity and transparency. Key elements of our approach include:

- Mandating that all management-level positions be posted and competitively recruited, with standardized interview questions and assessments.
- Eliminating degree requirements for all non-attorney positions.
- Implementing additional flagging and screening to ensure qualified veterans, veterans with disabilities, military spouses and dependent children receive equitable consideration throughout the recruitment process.
- Establishing a reimbursement program for attorneys admitted through Virginia's Admission Without Examination process who remain employed with the VIDC for at least one year.
- Providing recognition leave to employees who support recruiting efforts by attending on-campus interview sessions and consortium events on top of their other responsibilities.

## **Internship and Fellowship Programs**

Our commitment to diversity is reflected in our internship and fellowship programs. We have established paid internships aimed at enhancing diversity within our ranks and providing opportunities in legal deserts. We are now in our third year as a Community Access Program (CAP) partner with the Black Public Defender Association (BPDA). During FY 2026 we hosted five BPDA interns, and we have hired multiple candidates each year through the Bridging Borders paid internship program with North Carolina Central University (NCCU) and the BPDA fellowship. We've also hired multiple interns through the S.T.A.R (Small Town and Rural) Internship Program through the University of Richmond School of Law that places law students in hard to recruit areas.

Looking ahead, we seek to expand our partnerships to include formal paid internship programs with Howard University and the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) and to continue our participation in Howard's Public Defender Incubator Program. We are registered to participate in job fairs with Howard University for the summer and fall and will attend the Mid-Atlantic Black Law Students Association job fair this summer.

### **Advocacy for Systemic Change**

Our mission extends beyond the walls of our agency. We actively advocate for reforms within the legal profession to improve access and equity. During FY 2026 we contributed data and charts to the Entry, Growth and Distribution of Virginia Attorneys (EGAD) report highlighting the steep decline in the number of Virginia Bar takers and the impact of surrounding states adopting the Uniform Bar Exam. While Virginia will be adopting the Next Gen Bar in 2028, it would be our goal to be involved with any work groups or committees to establish portability scores and procedures.

### **Community Partnerships**

Collaboration remains central to our work. Through our CAP partnership with the BPDA, we gain access to training, conferences and fellowships that enrich our practice of inclusive excellence. We also partner with AmeriCorps through the Opioid Abatement Grant to bring in Peer Navigators to work directly with clients experiencing Opioid Use Disorder and strengthening our ability to engage underserved communities. We partner with Partners for Justice to provide more holistic services.

### **Language and Representation**

We continue to review and update our job postings, website and policies to eliminate non-inclusive language. Our communications reflect our commitment to diversity and signal to applicants and employees alike that we are building an inviting and inclusive environment.

### **Inclusive Excellence Training**

Embracing diversity requires ongoing education and awareness. We have provided inclusive excellence training sessions tailored to all position groups across the agency, with customized sessions for individual offices aligned with their core values.

### **Impact**

Our efforts continue to yield measurable results. Since February 2020 the racial and ethnic diversity of the agency has grown from approximately 18 percent to 26.2 percent. As of April 2026 the VIDC employed 703 individuals, including 184 employees who identify as racial or ethnic

minorities. This reflects an eight-percentage-point increase over five years and a slight decline from the prior reporting period. Leadership diversity continues to improve: 20 of 142 leadership and senior-level positions (14.1 percent) are held by individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups.

## **Mentorship and Professional Development**

The VIDC's agency-wide mentorship program entered its second year during FY 2026. Participation, mentor-mentee engagement and program check-ins increased during this cycle, and preliminary feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. We will survey participants and collect final feedback at the end of the current mentorship cycle in September 2026.

## **Agency Commitment to Hiring and Promotion**

We remain deeply committed to diversity and equity in all aspects of our hiring and promotion processes. Beyond the revised policy elements above, we have:

- Intentionally recruited from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and diverse law schools.
- Shared job postings on platforms catering to underrepresented groups and participated in events such as the Black Law Students Association conferences.
- Hired multiple graduates directly from our paid internship programs, increasing opportunities for emerging talent.
- Extended recognition leave to employees supporting recruitment efforts.

## **Significant Accomplishments**

- Increased our overall ethnic and racial diversity by eight percentage points since 2020 (10% overall increase in 2024).
- Maintained eight active affinity groups that drive policy changes and employee engagement.
- Completed our third year as a Black Public Defender Association Community Access Program partner.
- Established and expanded paid internship partnerships with NCCU and BPDA, resulting in multiple hires.
- Hosted five BPDA interns during FY 2026 and increased hiring from the Bridging Borders and BPDA programs.
- Eliminated degree requirements for non-attorney positions.
- Increased the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities in leadership roles to 14.1 percent (Up from 8% in 2020).
- Implemented enhanced veteran-focused screening and flagging in recruitment.

- Instituted a reimbursement program for attorneys admitted through Virginia’s Admission Without Examination process.

### Data Demonstrating Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Metric	2020	April 2026
Total Employees	537	703
Minority Employees (Number and %)	97 (18%)	184 (26.2%)
Leadership Diversity (% minority)	8%	14.1%

### Future Goals and Benchmarks

- Increase participation and feedback for the agency-wide mentorship program.
- Establish additional paid internship and fellowship programs with Howard University and UDC, and continue to participate in Howard’s Public Defender Incubator Program.
- Create a 1–2-year appellate fellowship in collaboration with BPDA or potentially Howard University.
- Develop a leadership academy with bi-annual supervisor training, an open leadership forum for front-line attorneys, and a resource toolkit for employees interested in management and leadership roles.
- Prepare a grant proposal in anticipation of the Cannabis Equity Reinvestment Board being reconvened so that funds can be leveraged for indigent defense initiatives.
- Advocate for adoption of the NextGen Bar Exam and equitable passing scores, and continue to push for a public defender/public interest admission rule.
- Provide leading and managing for equity training to all supervisors and incorporate these concepts into bi-annual supervisor training.
- Reimburse bar waiver fees for attorneys admitted to practice in Virginia without examination, subject to a one-year commitment.
- Be a stakeholder or contributor to any committee or work group to establish portability and/or minimum passing scores of the NextGen Bar Exam.