



*Commonwealth of Virginia
Office of the Governor*

Executive Order

NUMBER SIX (2026)

EVALUATING THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS TO THE BOARDS OF VISITORS FOR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

By virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor under Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and under the laws of the Commonwealth, including, but not limited to, §§ 2.2-103 and 2.2-110 of the *Code of Virginia*, I hereby direct the Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Secretary of the Commonwealth, to prepare a report and recommendations on changes to the Board of Visitors appointment process for the Commonwealth's public institutions of higher education as well as the process used by the Virginia Commission on Higher Education Board Appointments to evaluate potential appointees.

Importance of the Initiative

Virginia is home to some of the best, world-class public higher education institutions in the country that have long set the standard for academic excellence, innovation, and opportunity. According to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, over 280,000 students applied to Virginia's public four-year institutions during the 2024-2025 school year. Yet under the current federal administration, Virginia colleges and universities have faced unprecedented challenges from shifts in federal policy to attacks on institutional autonomy and mission. These pressures underscore the urgent need for the Commonwealth to reevaluate how governing boards are appointed, ensuring they are composed of individuals dedicated to upholding the quality, independence, and reputation of our institutions.

Strong governance is essential not just for protecting academic excellence, but for ensuring that our colleges and universities continue to prepare students to thrive in an increasingly complex and competitive world.

Directive

Pursuant to the authority vested in me as the Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth, and pursuant to Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and the laws of the Commonwealth, I hereby direct the Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Secretary of the Commonwealth, to assess and prepare a report evaluating the existing process used to appoint members to the governing boards of public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth. The report shall specifically address:

- Recommended legislative changes to the Board of Visitors appointment process, including but not limited to (a) the term length for members; (b) the reappointment process; and (c) the term start for new members; and
- Recommended changes, whether legislative or policy, to the process used by the Virginia Commission on Higher Education Board Appointments to evaluate potential appointees under § 2.2-2521 of the *Code of Virginia*.

The report and recommendations shall be provided to the Office of the Governor within 60 days of the effective date of this Executive Order.

Effective Date of the Executive Order

This Executive Order shall become effective upon its signing and shall remain in full force and effect until amended or rescinded by further executive order.

Given under my hand and under the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia this 17th day of January 2026.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abigail D. Spanberger".

Abigail D. Spanberger, Governor

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer B. Moon".

Jennifer B. Moon, Secretary of the Commonwealth