

January 20, 2020

The Honorable Ralph Northam
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam,

In February, "African American History Month," your promise to tell the "full history of Virginia" could advance significantly if you announce you will lead a multistate effort to secure initial funding for the National Liberty Memorial. You could inspire Virginians and the governors and citizens of states where as many as 10,000 African American Revolutionary War soldiers and patriots once resided. At the end of this session of the General Assembly, you will have an opportunity to supplement your initial budget. Please consider adding \$2 million for this project as part of your agenda on race. This is a modest fraction of state money spent to preserve Confederate monuments since 1902 under Section 10.1-2211. If you add "and remembrance" to race and do the following, you will succeed on a national scale:

- Announce a bipartisan ceremony, including corporate CEOs, to honor Virginia's patriots and propose a budget amendment to support the first phase of the National Liberty Memorial.
- Forward the outcome to the governors of 24 states that share the history and invite a dialogue.
- Forward the attached statistics to every member of the General Assembly showing how their districts are connected to over 600 Virginia soldiers with the suggestion that they share the data with constituents and local officials to stimulate appropriate commemorations.

There is a historic urgency, and a practical one, for why Virginia must lead. Slavery began here in 1619. As the capital of the Confederacy, it concocted schemes that still provoke violence. If Virginia opens a constructive dialogue, the state will win listeners and praise in all 50 states. For better or not, your appropriation request to purchase Franklin & Armfield in Alexandria is instructive. While this future museum may project real suffering, and make some Americans more attuned to the debt owed, it can do nothing about the consequences of slave pens unless another layer to the plan is added.

An enabler of human traffickers, Virginia's ancient laws and mores broke up families and rendered the members dirtied and invisible. Future generations would dishonor them: the offspring of slave marriages, for example, were considered illegitimate. Heritage societies could reject African American applicants for what were camouflaged as neutral reasons. Descendants might lack the audacity to overcome unwarranted shame and a tortuous paper trail to reconstruct severed kinship and misappropriated deeds, such as fighting in the Revolutionary War. Slavers, including the state, made it nearly impossible to validate life events between 10 generations originating with an enslaved person.

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This project was conceived after my aunt, Lena Santos Ferguson, was denied membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution. Her settlement in 1984 brought about the publication of the names and community connections of over 5,000 uncommemorated soldiers. Since then, thousands have discovered lost ancestors, reclaimed family history and discovered cousins – even accepting white ones. Those who chose to apply -- to confirm their research -- received warm welcomes in heritage societies. Years ago, I watched a sturdy man break down in tears at his induction -- his new white compatriots looking on. This comes down to "our ancestors fought together in that blasted revolution."

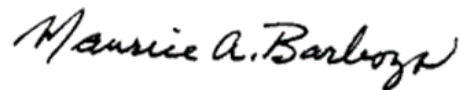
National Mall Liberty Fund DC, since 2007, has shared the names of local soldiers with hundreds of supervisors, mayors, town managers and governors. Over 70 resolutions of support resulted. The attached statistics contain the names of just over 400 known connections (out of 600 soldiers) to almost all 140 districts of the General Assembly. The communities of 26 districts are linked to between 20 and 74 soldiers -- 11 led by Democrats and 15 led by Republicans. This document is incentive enough for your budget amendment to win bipartisan support. An accompanying table suggests appropriation levels for 24 other states.

Liberty Fund DC is favored to win the last available site on the Mall. This is at a gateway to Washington along 14th Street, from Virginia Route 1 and I-395. Why else would bygone leaders name the former for Jefferson Davis, if it did not bear significance as a major statement? Uninterrupted sightlines to the Washington Monument will enable designers to weave a unifying and uplifting account into the landscape. General Washington noted their trustworthiness, initiative, perseverance and heroics – not attributes Franklin & Armfield likely advertised in a brochure.

Governor, the practical urgency is this: The expiration for this all-volunteer effort is September 2021. Several critical next steps require nonstop work by engineers, architects, historians and planners. An environmental assessment and preliminary designs are vital to final site approval. Agency and public opinions must be had through scoping and citizen forums. Congress prohibited federal funding. Just as well; a long-lasting plan to fix today's racial quagmire is more likely achieved by local communities working together -- as in the events following the Lexington alarm.

Please ring the alarm, Governor.

Sincerely,



Maurice A. Barboza
Founder and CEO

cc: The Honorable Adam Ebbin