

December 22, 2025

**VIA EMAIL ONLY**

Daniel T. Stillman, Esquire  
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Re: Virginia Wesleyan University

Dear Dan:

Thank you and all the attendees for your time on December 11, 2025. We appreciated the opportunity to meet. Please also extend my thank you to Dr. DeFord for her handwritten note.

In all candor, I anticipated learning that there was some actual reason for changing the name (along the lines of a legal or financial mandate that had not been disclosed publicly for some reason, such as fear of further harm to the University or something along those lines). The reason given at the meeting was that it was largely to recognize the Batten's family generosity to the University, along with a desire (but not a necessity) to dissociate completely from the "Wesleyan" name because of its religious connotation.

While we again acknowledge and are grateful for the Batten family's many contributions to Virginia Wesleyan, especially those of Mrs. Batten, it is not fitting to change the entire name of the University in order to recognize that. That is not typically how schools honor such a benefactor and no other school that the Batten family has so generously donated to has done so. Further, Dr. Miller himself said that while many schools were disaffiliating themselves from their Methodist connection, most were not changing the name but rather changing their mission statements to be more inclusive. Even the examples of SMU and TCU support the notion that more clever branding (rely on the initials) can be successful without a wholesale name change.

I must address Dr. Miller's quickness to indicate that I had incorrectly stated in our initial letter that the vote occurred in February as it was from his own mouth that I obtained such information. He told at least two media outlets that the vote occurred in February (<https://www.dcnnewsnow.com/video/wavy-interview-with-virginia-wesleyan-university-president/10999035/> and <https://marlinchronicle.vwu.edu/2025/09/11/making-the-transition-to-batten-university/>). I find it difficult to believe that he does know when the vote occurred and harder to believe he would give the incorrect date in two separate interviews.

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It was unclear to us who initiated the 52 stakeholder interviews that occurred between December 2024 and February 2025. Did the Board of Trustees request those or was that an initiative done by Dr. Miller? Either way, it failed to include engagement with a broader base of constituents, which could have been easily conducted and, quite frankly, can still be done.

What was perhaps most troubling was the lack of any current due diligence and/or research performed by the Board and/or the University regarding the potential name change prior to the Board's vote (whenever it actually happened). Instead, the Board relied on a dated and vague analysis from 2018-2019 that may or may not have included clear data on the Batten name and then failed to outsource a study to address (i) name recognition; (ii) the impact on donors, incoming and current students, staff, faculty, and/or alumni; and (iii) a marketing and communications strategy. While it was clear that the Board believes it is in the best interests of future students to change the name, nothing was provided supporting that "belief".

The limited data included "overwhelming" support from a meager 52 to maybe 100 "key stakeholders", for whom we still do not know the identity. Since the Board relied on this faulty subset, it incorrectly believed it was making a decision that would be welcomed. We know the Board is comprised primarily of volunteers who take their duties seriously and we know it is always difficult when a major decision is questioned. We tend to get defensive in those situations and dig in even deeper. However, we ask that the Board not do so here. Too much is at stake.

We know the Board believes it considered the decision thoroughly but looking at it from 52,000 feet, it happened very quickly. Assuming the timeline provided, there was a handful of undocumented conversations over a 15 year period about recognizing the Batten family in some profound way; there were 52 interviews from December to February; a Board discussion in February; approximately three additional months of possibly some other interviews; and then a vote in May. At most five (5) months, but again it is not clear if the Board was even the one to direct the 52 interviews, which would mean the Board deliberated on changing the entire name of the University for three (3) months without any involvement from the Alumni Council, other alumni, Staff, Faculty, current students, etc. We believe this is a wholly insufficient amount of time for a decision of this magnitude, particularly since there was no reason given to change the name quickly and because Mrs. Batten did not even want the name changed and had to be "convinced".

Another area that we have not addressed is the impact on the student-athletes who will now be mocked as "BUMs" (a downside, I am afraid of not performing a full analysis on the name). Like most Division III schools, the student-athlete is critical to enrollment. As you are aware, over 60% of the student body is engaged in various sports programs. Virginia Wesleyan's proud athletic history has approximately 90 All-Americans across all sports and 5 National Championships. This is part of the Virginia Wesleyan heritage - not Batten.

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**As such, we are formally asking the Board to either call a special meeting to reconsider their vote or to do so at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board.** While my clients do not believe *any* name change is needed or warranted and do not particularly like the name, for the purposes of saving at least some of Virginia Wesleyan's sixty-five (65) year heritage, they would be willing to accept a renaming to VW Batten. They believe, however, that the University's best interests would be met by tabling the decision and engaging all constituents in the process before voting anew. While it was clear from our meeting that the Board does not really care about the alumni and is solely focused on future students, we continue to believe the alumni network is crucial to any future success of the University.

Please advise if the Board is willing to accept this compromise and reconsider their vote.

Thank you,



Christine A. Williams

cc: Saving Virginia Wesleyan, LLC