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WASHINGTON OFFICE  
2055 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-4261

GLEN ALLEN OFFICE  
4201 DOMINION BOULEVARD, SUITE 110  
GLEN ALLEN, VA 23060  
(804) 401-4120

YORKTOWN OFFICE  
307 MAIN STREET  
YORKTOWN, VA 23690  
(757) 527-6270

[WWW.WITTMAN.HOUSE.GOV](http://WWW.WITTMAN.HOUSE.GOV)

March 5, 2025

Secretary Linda McMahon  
United States Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave, SW  
Washington, D.C., 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon,

I write to you to express my strong support for the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) RTR Teacher Residency (RTR) program, a recipient of a Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant (S336S240045).

The RTR program, established in 2011, is a partnership between the VCU School of Education and local Virginia school districts, including two counties in my congressional district. It trains future teachers who are dedicated to serving their communities and educating the future leaders of Virginia and the nation. Almost 400 teachers have been prepared by the RTR program and 82% of those teachers stay in their initial school districts.

The RTR program has a proven track record of preparing high quality teachers for the rigors and challenges of instructing and educating students in Virginia. Students of RTR-prepared teachers outperform other students on standardized assessments, including scoring 18 points higher in English and 35 points higher in math. Given the recent release of the National Assessment of Educational Progress that showed little progress in math and reading comprehension among elementary and secondary students, it is now more important than ever to ensure that our future educator workforce is well trained and highly skilled.

It is my understanding that the Department of Education issued a notice of grant award termination to VCU on February 7, 2025, due to noncompliance with President Trump's executive order on diversity, equity, and inclusion ("DEI") initiatives (EO 14151). I appreciate the department's swift action to ensure that teacher education pipelines remain focused on training high-quality and objective teachers. I respectfully request that you provide VCU with the opportunity to rewrite their grant application to ensure it complies with the president's policy priorities. As with all federal grants, I have no doubt that the department will conduct appropriate oversight of the RTR program should its grant be reinstated, and VCU is willing and able to demonstrate the necessary changes to their program that will comply with the president's policies

regarding DEI initiatives. The RTR program has a proven track record and over a decade of data to show that the program works. It is my hope that the funding for this grant can be repurposed to support an updated RTR program so that it can continue to address the severe teacher shortage and poor student test scores across Virginia.

If you have any questions, please reach out to my Washington, D.C. office at 202-225-4261.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert J. Wittman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robert. J. Wittman  
Member of Congress

CC:

Acting Assistant Secretary Ruth Ryder, United States Department of Education