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Why We Can't Wait: An Agenda for Equity & Justice

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Repository Citation

Spencer, A. Benjamin, "Why We Can't Wait: An Agenda for Equity & Justice" (2020). *Law School Experiences with Racial & Social Justice Issues*. 1.

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Why We Can't Wait

An Agenda for Equity & Justice

To the William & Mary Law School Community:

Since joining William & Mary Law School as your dean, I have been impressed time and again by how you have risen to meet and indeed exceed challenge after challenge. As we continue to maneuver through this pandemic, I will continue to listen, learn and engage with you as we launch together into an academic year like no other. I also want to thank you for welcoming me and my family into the Law School family this summer. We are settling in, and we look forward to the time when we can connect with you all in person.

I took on the role of dean of William & Mary Law School during our country's awakening to the plight of Black people in America. Now, more than any time in our collective history, many have come to realize what others have long understood: that racial and social injustice persists today, and must end today. As the first law school in the country, William & Mary Law School must be a leader of this movement, if our commitment to training engaged advocates for justice is to have real meaning.

That's why I am unveiling "*Why We Can't Wait - An Agenda for Equity and Justice*," a 12-part action plan for real and fundamental change to address inequality and injustice, not only in our Law School community but in our state, nation and world. Building from the recommendations of the Law School's 2019 Inclusion Task Force Report and conversations with faculty, staff, students and alumni, *Why We Can't Wait* outlines the actions our community will take to further equity and justice for all.

Several although not all of these initiatives will require added resources, during a time we also face current and prospective financial restrictions. Fortunately, because of the immense generosity of donors, we were able to wrap up William & Mary School of Law's *For the Bold* campaign at \$86.2 million. Those funds serve as the foundation for concrete actions to address issues of student equity, allowing the world to see that our Law School trains excellent attorney advocates from all backgrounds. Their donations will allow us to expand access to need-based scholarships and to provide even more support to first-generation and underrepresented students. We are also creating three scholarships for students who are dedicated to becoming advocates for equality and change.

To make sure that every student succeeds at William & Mary and with the help of our generous alumni, we have hired a director of academic & bar success to support all students, regardless of background, in their academic efforts and to ensure they pass the bar exam. We are also planning on hiring a new assistant dean who will focus on equity and inclusion issues and antiracism efforts at the Law School. We have already sought authorization to begin the search process so that we can fill this critical position by the beginning of the 2021-22 academic year.

William & Mary Law School must strive to create a lasting legacy of justice and equity. To that end, the Law School will take the lead on a new Center for Racial and Social Justice. This new center, which was developed collaboratively with the provost and which she will help fund, will serve the entire University and will allow our

faculty and students to engage in critical research and thought leadership to advance equity and social justice. With donor assistance, we are also launching a Community Law Clinic so that our students can get practical experience advocating for those in our underserved and vulnerable communities. The hope is that this clinic – which will address issues such as consumer protection, government benefits, housing, immigration and family law issues among others – will be fully operational within a year.

This is but a starting point, an important milestone in what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. referred to as the “long stride towards freedom.” I leave you with a few more words of Dr. King, whose book *Why We Can't Wait* inspired our plan: *“The mere fact that we live in the United States means that we are caught in a network of inescapable mutuality. Therefore, no American can afford to be apathetic about the problem of racial justice.”*

I encourage you to review [the attached infographic](#) outlining these efforts, and I welcome your ideas for others. Together we will help craft our collective future so that William & Mary Law School faculty, staff, students and alumni are recognized as advocates for change and leaders in the continued quest for social justice and inclusion.



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