

May 5, 2026

Dear Brown Scholarship Committee Chair, Senator Williams Graves, and committee members,

With the 2026-28 state budget still unsettled, I am writing this letter without knowing for certain that the \$2 million appropriation for the Brown Scholarship Program will be in the final version.

I have faith that it will, having survived the regular session, with approval by both the House and the Senate. Communications with legislators, including two conferees, bolsters my hope that this milestone funding will survive.

Two things are of real significance and I want the committee to be aware of them.

First, the \$2.050 million—\$1.025 million for each year of the biennium—marks the first time that the Brown Scholarship Program has been included in a governor's formal budget proposal. All previous state funding has been via budget amendments.

For the program, this is an historic step.

Governor Youngkin's doing so underscores the second point: the continued bipartisan support the Brown Scholarship Program has received. Bipartisan support was vigorously cultivated in the 2004 creation of the program in the General Assembly. That has continued.

On Friday, August 15, 2025, I texted House Minority Leader Terry Kilgore after reading about Gov. Youngkin's comments on the Commonwealth's financial outlook.

In that text, I requested Delegate Kilgore to ask Gov. Youngkin to include funding for the Brown Scholarship Program in his proposed 2026-28 state budget.

Experience has taught me that it is likely easier to keep something in a proposed budget than it is to add something. I also knew that the House Minority Leader would surely have the governor's ear. And Delegate Kilgore had sponsored the 2024-26 budget amendment for me in the House (Senator Creigh Deeds did so in the Senate).

Gov. Youngkin obviously agreed to include what amounts to level funding from the 2024-26 budget into his 2026-28 budget. It is my hope Governor Spanberger will agree to do so two years from now.

Another hallmark from the 2026 regular session, Madame Chair, was your own legislation which expands eligibility in the program to include qualified applicants attending out of state colleges and universities. While a legislative milestone in its own right, the vote in the General Assembly further underscored bipartisan support for the Brown Scholarship Program. The Senate voted in a block, 40-0, for passage and the House approved by a vote of 93 to 6.

The 2023 General Assembly vote to open eligibility to lineal and collateral descendants, as you recall, was unanimous.

This spirit of bipartisan support is clearly evident in the legislature and within the scholarship committee and is beautiful to see in a world where there are so many divisions.

Thank you, Madame Chair, for your energetic initiative, support and nurturing care for the Brown Scholarship Program.

My deep thanks, too, to every committee member for their own deeply vital commitment and support.

And to staff: Lauren Walker, Program Administrator with DLS, Michael Jackson, with the Senate Clerk's Office, and Scott Kemp, Student Loan Advocate with SCHEV.

For me, you are all doing the Lord's work, and I thank God for each and every one of you.

Ken Woodley

Originator of the Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Program and Fund

(PS: if something does happen to the 2026-28 funding, please reach out to Governor Spanberger ASAP and ask her for a \$2 million budget amendment!)