



November 5, 2025

The Honorable Harmeet K. Dhillon
Assistant Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

RE: Request for Investigation and Enforcement Action into Illegal DEI Practices of the City of Richmond, Virginia

Dear Assistant Attorney General Dhillon:

America First Legal Foundation (“AFL”) is a national, nonprofit organization working to promote the rule of law in the United States and ensure due process and equal protection of the law for all Americans. We write to request that the Department of Justice (“DOJ”) open an immediate investigation and take necessary enforcement action against the City of Richmond (“Richmond” or “City”) for engaging in a government-wide pattern or practice of discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, or national origin in employment and in the provision of city services. Cloaking its actions under the pretext of “racial equity,” Richmond openly defies Title VI¹ and Title VII² of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Orders issued by President Donald J. Trump.³

Federal law is clear. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits an employer from discriminating against an individual based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.⁴ Recently, the Department of Justice found “reasonable cause to believe that a state or local government employer [] engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination in violation of Title VII” and opened an investigation into the City of Austin to “take appropriate action to eliminate [the] violation.”⁵ In response to this action, AFL wrote to DOJ on October 16, 2025 to open a similar investigation into the

¹ 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq.

² 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2.

³ See Exec. Order No. 14173, 90 Fed. Reg. 8,633 (Jan. 31, 2025); see generally Exec. Order No. 14151, 90 Fed. Reg. 8,339 (Jan. 29, 2025).

⁴ 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq.

⁵ U.S. DEPT OF JUSTICE, C.R. DIV., No. DJ 170-TXW-1, *Investigation of Employment Practices of the City of Austin Pursuant to Section 707 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Sept. 18, 2025), <https://perma.cc/GX9C-MK57>.

City of Seattle (“Seattle”).⁶ Despite federal law and the President’s Executive Orders being abundantly clear, cities continue to blatantly violate the law. We now ask DOJ to open an investigation into the City of Richmond to expose the City’s unlawful discriminatory practices.

Similar to Seattle, Richmond flaunts federal law by also engaging in discriminatory practices by providing City services in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁷ Title VI clearly states that “[n]o person” shall be discriminated against based on “race, color, or national origin” in “any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”⁸ Richmond receives federal grant money and distributes it across the City’s government, in various departments, and for multiple purposes. In so doing, Richmond is taking hard-earned taxpayer money and funneling it into illegal race-based programs that violate federal law, presidential executive orders, and the will of the people. Some of its illegal actions are highlighted below.

On May 24, 2021—one year post-COVID—Richmond passed Resolution No. 2021-R032 (“Resolution”) to “express the City’s support for achieving equity and justice in access to resources and opportunities,” by creating the City of Richmond’s “Equity Agenda” (“Agenda”).⁹ The Agenda defines equity as “empower[ing] people and communities that have experienced past injustices by removing barriers to access and opportunity.”¹⁰ However, the Agenda recognizes that “racial inequity” is the result of “structural racism” that is “embedded” in every aspect of Richmond life.¹¹ Therefore, racial equity is “empowering” only certain people and communities wholly based on race. To fund these discriminatory goals, Richmond promised to seek “federal and state government” aid to foot the bill.¹²

In the same year, Richmond created its Office of Equity and Inclusion (“Equity Office”) to “advance[e] equity, inclusion and justice within the City’s internal and external facing policies, practices, operations and overall culture.”¹³ As dues-paying members of the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (“GARE”),¹⁴ the Equity Office—with the support of the national GARE race equity apparatus—works within

⁶ AMERICA FIRST LEGAL, *City of Seattle DEI Practices* (Oct. 16, 2025), <https://aflegal.org/government-accountability/city-of-seattle-dei-practices/>.

⁷ 42 U.S.C. §2000d *et seq.*; AFL has also requested an investigation into the City of Portland and the Portland Police Department for violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d *et seq.*, by discriminating on the basis of race in city programs and policies. AMERICA FIRST LEGAL, *City of Portland Policing* (Oct. 24, 2025), <https://aflegal.org/investigations/city-of-portland-policing/>.

⁸ 42 U.S.C. §2000d.

⁹ CITY OF RICHMOND, Res. No. 2021-R032, *The Richmond Equity Agenda* (Jun. 14, 2021), <https://perma.cc/97MX-T2NW>.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 1.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* at 2.

¹³ CITY OF RICHMOND, Office of Equity and Inclusion, <https://perma.cc/C33P-RDEN>.

¹⁴ *Id.*; *see also*, Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), Membership, <https://perma.cc/97RF-Y3AG>.

the City government to promote “fairness and inclusion in the availability of opportunities for all.”¹⁵ Instead of focusing on merit—individuals, businesses, employees, and endeavors that deserve to be funded, promoted, or hired—Richmond is wasting taxpayer money on “purposefully and intentionally institutionaliz[ing] equity, inclusion, and justice.”¹⁶ The top-down objectives are:

- To help develop a collective, cohesive understanding of racial equity, inclusion, cultural competency and belonging amongst city leadership and staff
- To help city leadership and staff better comprehend and embrace the role of government in advancing racial equity and justice
- To help create the groundwork for normalizing and operationalizing equity and inclusion throughout all city departments/offices so that all leadership and staff operate with an equity lens and that equity and inclusion become embedded within all city policies, daily operations and overall culture
- To work with community members and other stakeholders to collaboratively advance equity work within the City¹⁷

The City achieves these objectives by mandating race-based diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DEI”) training for all City staff.¹⁸ In Richmond’s 2026 Adopted Annual Fiscal Plan, the City highlights certain “performance measures,” including the percentage of employees in the Neighborhood and Community Services office that completed equity training.¹⁹ In Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024, 85% of employees completed the training.²⁰ The goal for FYs 2025 and 2026 is 100%.²¹

The City embeds these discriminatory themes throughout its human resources and hiring materials. Although espousing to be an “equal opportunity employer” in the small print, Richmond posts jobs with the tagline “Are you Richmond R.E.A.D.Y?” where “ready” stands for “**R**espect, **E**quity. **A**ccountability. **D**iversity. **Y**ou.”²² The City, within the past year, posted a promotional YouTube video for the Richmond Police Department, urging viewers to “Join the Richmond Police Department” and asking viewers if they were “Richmond R.E.A.D.Y.”²³ The message is clear: public safety and compliance with federal law are secondary to equity and diversity.

¹⁵ Office of Equity and Inclusion, <https://perma.cc/C33P-RDEN>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Richmond Equity Agenda* at 7, <https://perma.cc/97MX-T2NW>.

¹⁹ CITY OF RICHMOND, *Fiscal Year 2026 Adopted Annual Fiscal Plan* (Mar. 27, 2025) at Section 4-14, <https://perma.cc/MLU5-HKTA>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² CITY OF RICHMOND, Human Resources Department, *Human Resources – Police Department* (job posting) (Oct. 27, 2025), <https://perma.cc/A6CV-BT6N>.

²³ RICHMOND VIRGINIA, *Join the Richmond Police Department. Richmond R.E.A.D.Y? Respect | Equity | Diversity | YOU!*, (YouTube, Mar. 25, 2024), <https://perma.cc/X9KK-ZXSZ>.

Subcomponents of the Richmond government also understand the directive. For example, the Office of Sustainability developed a “Shared Accountability Framework” within its “Climate Equity Action Plan” to ensure that “equity-centered” strategies are implemented to address climate change.²⁴ The Mayor claimed that Richmond “cannot address climate change without recognizing its disproportionate impacts on certain members of our community.”²⁵ Richmond only cares about equitable outcomes for certain groups, declaring that the City “leads with race” because it is a Richmonder’s race “that predicts quality of life outcomes.”²⁶ The 566-page Climate Equity Action Plan asks “What is climate change? What is equity? What is race? How do these concepts intersect?”²⁷ and includes an “Equity Assessment” and “Equity Screening Tool.”²⁸ The espoused vision of the Action Plan is to ensure that “all Richmonders,” regardless of “identity,” live in a “climate-resilient” neighborhood, but the City unlawfully diverts resources to only certain Richmonders based wholly on their race.²⁹



Figure 3.5. RVAgreen 2050 Equity Framework | Source: Government Alliance on Race and Equity; Desiree Williams-Rajee, Kapwa Consulting (modified)

The Richmond Racial Equity and Environmental Justice (“REEJ”) program builds on the concepts in the Climate Equity Action Plan to address the “many inequities associated with climate change impacts” that are based on “race and ethnicity.”³⁰ The

²⁴ CITY OF RICHMOND, *RVAgreen 2050; Climate Equity Action Plan 2030* at 3-4, <https://perma.cc/KJ25-JC6H>.

²⁵ *Id.* at iii.

²⁶ *Id.* at iv.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.* at App. F & App. H.

²⁹ *Id.* at iv.

³⁰ CITY OF RICHMOND, *RVAgreen 2050; Racial Equity and Environmental Justice*, <https://perma.cc/2QQR-SX7N>.

basic discriminatory function of the REEJ is to divert resources to communities of certain races to help these communities “cope with and adapt to climate change impacts.”³¹ The City’s REEJ program prides itself on receiving “equity training” and “one-on-one coaching with equity experts” in a stunning admission of wasted taxpayer funds.³²

In the “What can you do” section, instead of highlighting local businesses doing work in the climate arena, the REEJ highlights only those organizations “led by people of color working on environmental issues” that residents can “support.”³³

What you can do:

- We cannot ignore the link between racial equity and climate change. Build your knowledge and understanding of this critical issue using the resources below.
 - Perspectives on [Why Racial Justice is Climate Justice](#)
 - Urban Sustainability Directors Network [Equity Foundations Training](#) (free)
 - Washington Environmental Council [Resources on Environmental Justice, Racism, and Whiteness](#)
 - NAACP [Environmental & Climate Justice Program](#)
 - Racial Equity Tools - [Environmental Justice Resources](#)
 - Richmond Public Library [Black Lives Matter Anti-Racist Reading List](#)
 - From anti-racism educator Tim Wise, [Code of Ethics for White Anti-Racists](#)
- Support local organizations led by people of color working on environmental issues such as [Southside ReLeaf](#), [Groundwork RVA](#), and [Virginia Interfaith Power & Light](#).
- [Tell us how we can do more, better.](#)

In another stark example of wasted taxpayer funds, within the Richmond Department of Public Works sits the Office of Equitable Transit and Mobility, which publishes a policy guide called “Path to Equity” (“Guide”) regarding “Richmond Connect” — a multimodal transportation plan.³⁴ The Guide is “the policy that Richmond will adhere to when making transportation decisions and investments.”³⁵ The Guide is extensive and includes “equity factors” and “guiding principles,” and

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

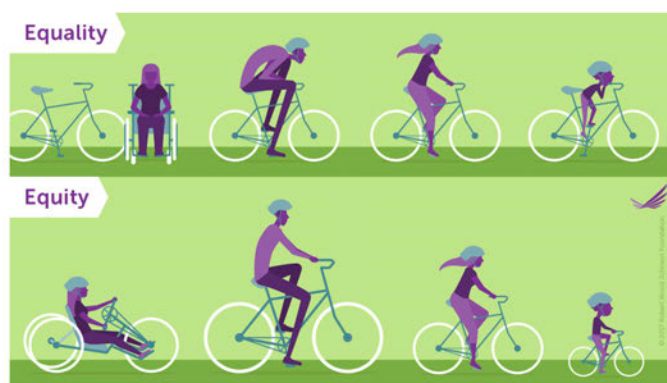
³³ *Id.*

³⁴ CITY OF RICHMOND PUBLIC WORKS, *Path to Equity: Policy Guide for Richmond Connects*, “What,” <https://perma.cc/P2CV-PKMF>.

³⁵ *Id.*

defines racism as “intentional and subconscious biases ... against BIPOC people.”³⁶ The “guiding principles” include “put[ting] your money where your mouth is” to ensure taxpayer money is “weighted toward reducing” the income gap in BIPOC communities, affirming its definition of racism as bias against only those people who are BIPOC.³⁷ The Guide goes on to distinguish between “equity” and “equality,” highlighting that the “American government” has discriminated against BIPOC persons in transportation by focusing on equality instead of equity, and committing to champion “an equitable transportation network” where “no one group bears the benefits more or less than any other group of persons.”³⁸ In order to spread the wealth equitably amongst Richmonders, the City inevitably must treat Richmonders unequally in direct contradiction with Title VI and basic American principles.

To illustrate equity, people often compare it to equality, illustrated in the Figure below. If pursuing a state of equality, every person – no matter what their individual needs are – receives a bicycle. When pursuing equity, every person is given a bicycle that fits their specific needs.



Consequently, at a very basic level, the City of Richmond has abandoned its corporate purpose to “promote the general welfare of the city and the safety, health, peace, good order, comfort, convenience and morals of its *inhabitants*.”³⁹ Through its discriminatory provision of city services, Richmond has embraced discrimination and oppression of certain groups of people across the city government. The most basic City functions and responsibilities, including providing safe and maintained spaces for all of Richmond’s residents, have taken a back seat to “equity.” The law demands otherwise. All citizens of Richmond must be equally protected, not be pawns in the City’s DEI score,⁴⁰ which metes out City services in violation of federal law.

Accordingly, AFL respectfully requests that DOJ initiate a formal investigation into the City of Richmond and pursue appropriate enforcement action against the City under federal civil rights laws. We further ask DOJ to coordinate with the

³⁶ *Id.* at “Glossary of Terms.”

³⁷ *Id.* at “Guiding Principles.”

³⁸ *Id.* at “Equity Over Equality.”

³⁹ THE CHARTER OF THE CITY OF RICHMOND §2.01 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ GREATER RICHMOND PARTNERSHIP, *Why Richmond? Diversity + Inclusion* (“The City has received a perfect score on the Municipal Equality Index.”), <https://perma.cc/8S2K-59FX>.

appropriate departments to investigate into specific City of Richmond programs that violate federal civil rights laws.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
/s/ *Emily Percival*
Senior Counsel
America First Legal Foundation

cc: The Honorable Russ Vought, Office of Management and Budget