

March 14, 2025

Board of Trustees  
Florida A&M University

Dear Board of Trustee Members,

I am honored to submit my application for the esteemed position of President of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). Since its founding in 1887, FAMU has been a beacon of academic excellence, innovation, and social mobility, transforming the lives of students who graduate as leaders who shape industries, communities, and the world. As the nation's top-ranked public Historically Black College and University (HBCU), FAMU has cultivated a legacy of producing trailblazers in science, business, law, education, and the arts—they are leaders who embody resilience, intellect, and an unwavering commitment to service. With a deep appreciation for FAMU's rich history and an unrelenting focus on the future, I am ready to lead this university with purpose, passion, and an unshakable belief in its limitless potential.

My academic journey and professional experiences have uniquely prepared me for this opportunity, deepening my appreciation for the transformative power of education. As a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I began my academic pursuits at Lincoln University (PA), where I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Chemistry. Building on this foundation, I earned a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Pharmacology from Pennsylvania State University's Hershey Medical School. To further enhance my expertise in research excellence, I completed a respected postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Neurosurgery at Brown University/Rhode Island Hospital. Beyond my academic and research endeavors, I continued to enhance my leadership skills. I have trained with several prestigious programs, including the American Council on Education (ACE) Fellows Program and the Management Development Program (MDP) at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. These experiences, coupled with a distinguished 30-year career as an administrator and faculty member, have equipped me with the vision, leadership, and dedication needed to serve as the next President of FAMU.

I am driven by an unwavering commitment to fostering student success, advancing groundbreaking research, ensuring financial sustainability, and building strategic partnerships that propel institutional growth. My tenure at FAMU and Virginia State University (VSU) has been results-oriented, leading to measurable impacts that empower

the next generation of leaders. My leadership experiences align seamlessly with the essential duties and responsibilities of the next President of FAMU.

## LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

I currently serve as the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at FAMU. I provide strategic oversight for academic quality, student success, research productivity, and institutional operations efficiency. I also have executive oversight of multiple divisions, including Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Research, Strategic Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness. Additionally, I was honored to serve as Interim Vice President for Advancement and Executive Director of the FAMU Foundation, where I spearheaded the cultivation of philanthropic giving and corporate partnerships. Previously, I served as Executive Vice President and Provost at VSU, with additional duties serving as the Vice President for Student Affairs and Vice President for Research.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING / STUDENT SUCCESS / ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

At both FAMU and VSU, I have leveraged strategic planning as a catalyst for transformation and intentional success. Through bold leadership and an unwavering commitment to excellence, I have led game-changing initiatives that have redefined student success, elevated national rankings, secured historic funding, and cultivated a culture of innovation and accountability. By prioritizing academic innovation, strategic faculty investment, and student-centered success initiatives, I am committed to ensuring that our university stands at the forefront of higher education—competitive, forward-thinking, and deeply aligned with the evolving needs of the workforce and society.

At FAMU, I oversee the execution of our Boldly Striking 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, which has been instrumental in FAMU's success. We have achieved record-setting gains in student success metrics, with the four-year graduation rate increasing by six percentage points (from 35% to 41%) and retention rates reaching an unprecedented 90%. Through targeted interventions such as the "Finish in Four" campaign, Living Learning Communities, and enhanced first-year advising programs, we have strengthened academic persistence and positioned students for long-term success. These efforts have contributed to FAMU's rise in the U.S. News & World Report rankings, climbing 18 spots to #152 among National Universities, securing a Top 100 Public University ranking at #81, and maintaining its distinction as the #1 Public Historically Black College and University for six consecutive years.

As the chief architect behind VSU's five-year strategic plan "Preeminence with Purpose" Strategic Plan, I led efforts to successfully secure record Capital and Operational funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Sponsored programs research expenditures doubled,

and the academic inventory grew with the development of eight new innovative academic degree programs, six fully online programs, and the establishment of 10 new institutes and centers. VSU enrolled its largest incoming class of new students in more than three decades and increased the four-year graduation rate to the highest in the university's history.

Throughout my tenure at FAMU and VSU, I have been committed to academic excellence, ensuring that programs remain innovative, competitive, and aligned with both accreditation standards and workforce demands. My leadership has been instrumental in the expansion of academic offerings, the successful reaccreditation of numerous programs, and the advancement of research initiatives that position both institutions as leaders in higher education. At FAMU, I have provided executive oversight in the development of new academic programs aligned with workforce demands, such as Aerospace Engineering (M.S. & Ph.D.), Engineering Data Analytics, and Cyber Security for Engineering. Similarly, at VSU, I led the launch of innovative programs, such as an MBA, M.S. in Data Analytics, and Mechanical Engineering, ensuring graduates met the needs of evolving industries. Under my leadership, online education flourished, with VSU establishing its first fully online programs. I also prioritized experiential learning by developing living-learning communities and career readiness initiatives, contributing to a notable 8% increase in the six-year graduation rate.

#### **SUPPORT FOR ATHLETICS**

Athletics play a crucial role in the university experience, fostering school spirit, enhancing student engagement, and serving as a pathway to academic and professional success for student-athletes. Building on my commitment to institutional excellence and student success, I have also dedicated my efforts to enhancing the role of athletics within the university environment. As the Co-Chair of the Athletics Action Plan Committee at FAMU, I provide oversight to improve student-athlete outcomes by addressing key challenges such as academic advisement, compliance staffing shortages, and training related to student-athlete eligibility. The committee has worked diligently to enhance the student-athlete admission and transfer process, ensuring a smooth transition and academic success for all athletes. Additionally, in 2015, I chaired the NCAA Academic Acceleration Support Program (AASP) Oversight Advisory Council, where I led efforts to implement initiatives funded by a \$300,000 NCAA grant to boost student-athlete academic performance and improve Academic Progress Rates (APR). It is essential that FAMU remains committed to strengthening the athletic framework, ensuring that student-athletes have the resources and support needed to excel both on and off the field.

## RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Beyond student success, I have championed research excellence and faculty development. FAMU's path to the Carnegie Classification's Research 1 (R1) status requires sustained growth in research expenditures, faculty scholarship, and doctoral production—elements that remain at the core of my strategic leadership in advancing research excellence and graduate education. Throughout my tenure at both FAMU and VSU, I have been committed to enhancing faculty development as a catalyst for research excellence, institutional advancement, and graduate education. My executive oversight and leadership in this area have been instrumental in increasing faculty research productivity, securing significant external funding, and fostering an environment that supports cutting-edge innovation. To bolster research capabilities, I introduced targeted grant-writing workshops, mentorship initiatives, and interdisciplinary collaboration programs. These initiatives significantly elevated research productivity. At FAMU, we achieved record-breaking research expenditures of \$68 million and secured \$112 million in research awards, alongside unprecedented growth in indirect cost recovery. At VSU, external funding doubled—from \$13.7 million in 2016 to \$28.8 million in 2022—while also increasing indirect cost recovery from \$598,000 to \$914,000. This influx of funding not only expanded faculty-driven research but also enhanced graduate programs and strengthened the pipeline for doctoral education.

## FISCAL HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Across both institutions, I have strategically leveraged fundraising and government relations to secure vital resources, foster corporate and legislative partnerships, and advance institutional missions. These efforts have directly contributed to student success, faculty development, and the long-term financial sustainability of these universities. As Interim Vice President for Advancement and Executive Director of the FAMU Foundation, I managed a \$4.7 million budget and spearheaded efforts that generated \$12.6 million, with \$11.7 million in new cash contributions. I cultivated relationships with corporate and philanthropic partners, facilitating major gifts such as a \$1.2 million Lilly Rattler Scholars Program and a \$1 million health career initiative funded by the Lilly Foundation. I also engaged members of the FAMU Industry Cluster, securing investments from companies like JPMorgan Chase, Chevron, and Wells Fargo to support student career readiness, faculty research, and program development. At VSU, I managed a \$140 million budget and successfully secured record-breaking state funding, including \$245 million in capital and \$48 million in operational funds through Virginia's state funding process. I also played a key role in major state-funded initiatives, such as the \$7.3 million Tech Talent Pipeline Investment and a \$5.3 million University Principal Preparation Initiative. My ability to align

institutional goals with corporate and government funding priorities has been instrumental in advancing the mission of both universities.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE & TRANSFORMATION**

As a forward-thinking leader, I have coordinated efforts to cultivate a culture of accountability by integrating enterprise risk management, financial sustainability, and university policy into a unified strategic framework. With a focus on strengthening institutional resilience, we are optimizing the allocation of resources and reinforcing governance to ensure that accountability is embedded at every level of the university. I have positioned enterprise risk management (ERM) as a cornerstone of operational resilience, transforming the Office of Enterprise Risk Management into a proactive force that enhances financial sustainability and risk-informed decision-making. By aligning ERM principles with strategic planning, I am fostering a culture where risk assessment and mitigation drive institutional excellence. Recognizing financial sustainability as integral to accountability, I am spearheading the Resource Optimization Initiative, aligning resources with institutional priorities to ensure transparency, efficiency, and long-term impact. My approach extends beyond finances to encompass people, processes, and technology, reinforcing data-driven decision-making. Additionally, I have positioned the university Policy Office into a strategic pillar of governance by modernizing policies, enhancing accessibility, and establishing cross-functional collaboration to ensure compliance and relevance. By embedding accountability into risk management, financial stewardship, and policy governance, FAMU will emerge as a resilient institutional framework that supports long-term success in an evolving higher education landscape.

## **COMMUNITY AND EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS**

I am committed to creating transformative initiatives that serve our community while preparing the next generation of professionals. My vision has been rooted in equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in research, influence public policy, and transform leaders to address issues that impact our community. As the Executive Vice President and Provost at VSU, I spearheaded the establishment of the Virginia State University Public Health Institute (VSUPHI) to address health disparities in underserved communities. Our mission focused on serving marginalized populations, lower-income individuals, and rural communities, by tackling factors such as access to care, quality of care, availability of healthy foods, environmental quality, community safety, education, and economic insecurity.

A key component of this initiative was establishing strategic partnerships that enhanced outreach and service. Through collaborations with organizations like Central State

Hospital, the Department of Health, Local Churches, and the VSU Mobile Health Units, we extended our impact to local and regional communities, providing essential health services where they were needed most. These partnerships not only strengthened our program but also created real-world learning opportunities for our students. To ensure sustainability and growth, I actively pursued increased funding in public health and related fields, fostering an environment that supported research, scholarships, and program expansion. By fostering strong partnerships, securing resources, and creating opportunities for professional growth, VSU served as a catalyst for positive change in both the local and global communities.

#### MY VISION

As the next President of Florida A&M University, my vision is that we will be driven by a relentless pursuit of excellence, innovation, and impact. As the nation's premier public HBCU, we will set the standard for 21st-century higher education—where academic brilliance, groundbreaking research, and student success converge to transform lives and communities. We will boldly lead in areas of STEM innovation, entrepreneurship, and social mobility, ensuring that every student is equipped to compete globally and lead fearlessly. By embracing cutting-edge technologies, fostering cross-disciplinary collaborations, and expanding strategic partnerships, we will elevate FAMU to new heights—a top-tier research powerhouse, an incubator of exceptional talent, and a catalyst for innovation. With an unwavering commitment to excellence, access, and affordability, we will create an ecosystem where students thrive academically, graduate on time, and enter the workforce as trailblazers and change-makers. Our faculty will be empowered to push the boundaries of discovery, and our alumni network will serve as a testament to FAMU's enduring legacy of leadership and innovation. Together, we will redefine the future of higher education—one that is bold, visionary, and unapologetically FAMU.

I welcome the opportunity to serve as the next President of this distinguished institution and ensure that FAMU continues to be a beacon of excellence for future generations.

Respectfully,



Donald E. Palm, III, Ph.D.