

June 14, 2023

Dear Senator John Bell,

On behalf of the Virginia Chapter of Gallaudet University Alumni Association (GUAA), I am writing to express our concerns about the future of VSDB, especially the Deaf Department.

Many members of GUAA graduated from VSDB and other schools for the Deaf who later came to VSDB as faculty and staff members. Some of us held administrative and governing positions, not only at VSDB but at other schools and colleges and universities serving Deaf people. A good number of us have earned degrees in Higher Education, not only from Gallaudet but institutions elsewhere. From early education years at VSDB, one may find college professors, religious leaders, scientists, engineers, people in the world of business and in entertainment. All of whom are Deaf. Eight Deaf members have served on the VSDB Board of Visitors. Two of us are still on the Board.

For many years VSDB demonstrated excellence in education, sports and extracurricular activities. We have always been concerned about the quality of education in the Deaf Department and advocated for the same. This year, our concern has multiplied. Enrollment keeps dropping yearly. While it was not unusual to have 400 Deaf and Blind students attend VSDB every year in the 1950s, 1960s 1970s, it's so different today with an enrollment of around below 100 students. Only one Deaf graduate will go to Gallaudet this fall and none in recent years.

For years, VSDB participated in academic bowls. The Deaf students did well in these competitions. Some of them advanced to regional and national competitions, always exciting events for the students and for us all.

In the year of 1969 VSDB was accredited. It held its unforgettable accreditation banquet on the campus where several celebrities especially Governor of Virginia Mills Godwin, Dr. Edward Merrill, President of Gallaudet University and Dr. Robert Frisina, Founder and Director of National Technical Institute of the Deaf (NTID)

attended the event. Today VSDB's accreditation is hardly ever mentioned. Does it exist?

We are heartbroken to see the low morale among the Deaf faculty and staff members today. It is there, and Administration is doing little to overcome it. Surely students and teachers perform better with recognition and encouragement from leadership. Although Superintendent Pat Trice holds a degree from Gallaudet University, she is not Deaf, nor does she have any true understanding or acceptance of the Deaf. The Deaf community considers Pat Trice an Audist, someone who knows the difference between discrimination and prejudice toward Deaf people yet continues to oppress and manipulate them herself. It is as if our input is not wanted or needed.

The Deaf community celebrates events of importance just like any other community and VSDB used to observe them too. For example, December 10<sup>th</sup> which the Community calls "Gallaudet-Clerc Day" is when we gather to acknowledge and give thanks to Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc for founding the very first free school for the Deaf in this country. VSDB no longer celebrates this occasion of Thanksgiving. It is just as if Superintendent Trice is trying to cancel our history. A disconnect between VSDB and its Deaf alumni is obvious and very sad.

On March 8, I attended the Board of Visitors meeting. I was disturbed by the Superintendent's body language and bearing when she spoke. Her anger was obvious. Each person who wanted to speak was given three minutes, but Pat Trice spoke for 25 minutes. She was asked to stop speaking twice but refused.

These are but a few of the ways Supt Trice has conducted herself during her years at VSDB. We believe she is a bigot and not qualified to continue serving VSDB as Superintendent. Since the administration of Dr. Joe Panko three superintendents were handpicked. Pat Trice is one of them. We strongly urge that her contract not be renewed this year and the VSDB Board of Visitors use a proper and democratic process to search for a new superintendent. Between March 8 and now, there has been no response to the many letters that were sent to Pat Trice and the Board of

Visitors, however we hope to hear from you soon to bear witness that you do hold your appointment by the Governor in the esteem that comes with it.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Janice Couch Dillman,  
Gallaudet University Alumni Association (GUAA),  
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