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The Honorable TJ Donovan
Attorney General of Vermont
109 State Street
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Dear Mr. Attorney General:

The proposed closure of Marlboro College presents a profound dilemma. I've been following the actions and reactions for months, and I must admit that when it first seemed that Marlboro would close, I thought, 'oh, well, different administrations and the Board have spent years diminishing the self-governance at Marlboro, the faculty have come to resemble their colleagues at more mainstream, conventional institutions – so why would I speak up to voice my opposition?' Marlboro today is not compelling. Marlboro today is simply a shadow of what it was when it functioned successfully as one of the most important models of teaching and learning in US higher education.

The reasons that Marlboro has reached this point have little to do with changing demographics or the economy. Therefore, I would suggest that the current failure of the College is actually an opportunity to reinvigorate its core and relaunch it using the significant assets that remain at this point. Rather than a liquidation, as championed by Marlboro's current President and endorsed by the Board of Trustees, now is the time to reset Marlboro after years of mismanagement and mission drift. What an opportunity!

Anyone looking at Marlboro's current dilemma would wonder why it took so long for many to speak out about its impending demise. Closure wasn't on the table until recently, but many of us flagged over the course of years the mistakes that were being made, the missteps taken, and the grave danger that those posed to the College's viability. We did, in fact, speak out!

Until now, no one has listened. Simply put, there was no audience when we spoke up and called for change. It wasn't until closure was proposed that we got the chance to see and feel just how hostile successive administrations were to our concerns, and just how irresponsibly the Board had acted. We could also see how senior leadership was – and is – misrepresenting a chain of events and choices that it made of its own accord with no consultation, let alone any request for help.

The worst part is the effort to try to explain how Emerson College in Boston is a 'fit' for what has become an 'idea' of Marlboro College, and how that fit justifies the closure of the College versus a serious reworking of the College to keep it operational in Vermont. The fit is a fantasy, from the characterization of Marlboro today to Marlboro's and Emerson's commitments to 'preserve' some of Marlboro's distinctive characteristics.

At the end of the day, the most important elements of Marlboro cannot transfer elsewhere. Marlboro is rooted in Vermont tradition and in the self-governance traditions of Town Meeting. The few faculty who will be offered jobs at Emerson and the few students who may choose to continue their studies at

Emerson hardly seem to justify the cost of the transaction, especially when we consider the lost opportunity to recreate Marlboro and restore it to its distinctive place for truly transformative teaching and learning.

In a normal world, both the chief executive of an institution and its board would stand committed to perpetuating the institution. In fact, that is their fiduciary duty. What Marlboro has become is the result of failed leadership enabled by a tired, irrelevant Board of Trustees, which lacks the creative vision and tenacity to confront the challenges it has failed to recognize, let alone address.

Those with power at Marlboro have chosen to mislead and give up. Outside the institution, however, there are hundreds of individuals committed to sustaining a Marlboro College that is self-governing, successful, and impactful. In order to do that, we need to be in control; those who have given up on Marlboro College must step aside.

There is no reason not to pause the liquidation of Marlboro College. The Corporation of Marlboro College has not made a convincing case to anyone, backed up with evidence and supported by best practice, that the College must close and that its hard-earned assets be gifted to an institution with no connection or commitment to Marlboro College.

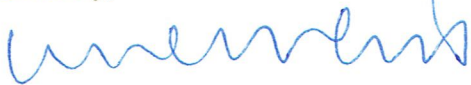
I spent many years working on institutional development all over the world. And while I did that for a wealthy and generous foundation, we were strategic with our resources and relied more on vision and creative approaches than unsustainable cash contributions. Marlboro's current assets are a boon to any reboot, and must not be forfeited before a serious attempt to re-envision the College is undertaken.

It boggles the mind that those of us who have come forward to engage Marlboro's sustainability have been manipulated, blindsided, deceived, dismissed and slandered. We are part of Marlboro's community and, indeed, its future despite what the current President and Board of Trustees might think. We demonstrate ourselves as stewards of Marlboro's legacy in everything we do, and now it is time for us to secure Marlboro's future.

I ask you to join our effort by allowing Marlboro to continue as a Vermont institution.

It would be a pleasure to discuss with you the way forward for Marlboro.

Sincerely,



Rhett Bowlin, '93
Director, Higher Education Support Program (Budapest)
Director, Africa Climate Change Adaptation Initiative (Johannesburg)
Open Society Foundations, 1994-2012