

# Commonwealth of Virginia

STEVE DESCANO  
COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY

COUNTY OF FAIRFAX  
4110 CHAIN BRIDGE ROAD, ROOM 114  
FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA 22030-4047

06/04/2020

## CA DESCANO ANNOUNCES NEW JUSTICE REFORM MEASURES

*New reforms in the Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney include formation of an advisory council, restructure of office leadership, and a focus on new data collection and sharing practices.*

FAIRFAX COUNTY, VA – Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano has taken the next major steps in his reform plan for the Fairfax County criminal justice system. CA Descano has released the following statement with details outlining changes to his office:

"Our country—our society—is still writhing in response to recent events. It's important that we take conspicuous action right now to ensure that real change starts to take hold now. That's why I'm announcing several immediate steps that I'm taking to institutionalize change in our local criminal justice system.

First and foremost, it's important to better understand our community and how our justice system interacts with it daily. So, I'm announcing the formation of the Justice Advisory Council. The purpose of this organization will be to hear from local voices, discuss the potential for better processes, exchange data, group think policy ideas, and help lead the fight for tangible justice reform. This group will be made up of community representatives from throughout Fairfax County: heads of nonprofits, advocates, activists, faith leaders, business owners, and everyday community members will be meeting with me and my office regularly. If I'm going to fight for our community's values inside this courthouse, I want to be sure we're always aware of what's going on in the community as well. Although I've begun to ask some prominent leaders in our community to participate, we'll be presenting a webpage and application process for any Fairfax County resident to apply to be a part of the group.

Next, I intend to begin changing the structure of this office to better serve our constituents in a conscientious and forward-thinking way. That's why I have begun restructuring my leadership team to accomplish very important steps to bringing the values of this community into the courthouse—open communication, procedural change, and courtroom implementation—by establishing three new designations with an

official Deputy for Community Justice, an official Deputy for Policy Reform, and an official Deputy for Court Strategies.

My Deputy for Community Justice will be my conduit to the community at all times. They'll help me identify shortcomings within our criminal justice system as well as create new programs and bolster existing ones that remedy deep-seated problems. Community Justice means connecting local stakeholders to solve issues and meet a need for reform in our criminal justice system. My Deputy for Community Justice will be my watchdog for justice for all in Fairfax County.

However, knowing about problems isn't enough—we need to address them as well. That's why my Deputy for Policy Reform will be my lead on taking the information we gather and transforming it into thoughtful, progressive, actionable policy that we will implement in this office. They'll review current policies and carefully analyze internal data as well as the prosecutorial decision-making process. They're going to develop new policies and procedures to better align our criminal justice system with the values of the community. My Deputy for Policy Reform will be my navigator, finding the best path forward for Fairfax County.

Once we know the correct path ahead, we must make sure we walk it. My Deputy for Court Strategies will be responsible for implementing the changes our community is asking for in the courthouse. They will be responsible for training our prosecutors and making sure our office is equipped—both with resources and proper procedure—to reform our local system. My Deputy for Court Strategies will make sure we bring Fairfax County's criminal justice system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century case-by-case, courtroom-by-courtroom.

Today's last major announcement for is that I intend to hire a Director of Data. When I took office in January, I was shocked and dismayed at the complete lack of data that was kept by this office. We found no centralized information on arrests, charges, plea deals, convictions, sentencing, or the demographic information of victims, defendants, and everyone in between. You can't meet the needs of this community and know that you're doing the right thing if you're not keeping track of the decision-making and outcomes of this office. My Director of Data will be in charge of capturing, cataloging, and processing all of this untapped data. We will not be an office that makes criminal justice decisions based on gut intuition or preconceived notions. We will scrutinize the data to better understand our prosecutorial tendencies and ensure that this county's criminal justice system serves everyone fairly and equally.

As we move forward and engage in long-overdue conversations with every corner of this county, become better at communicating with you and our varying districts, create new policy that reflects our shared values, and shed light on real, honest data, we will always be open and honest with you. Even if we uncover something that highlights a mistake coming from this office, you will know.

This office and the new directives that I will continue to put in place have one unwavering purpose: to serve you. And at a time like this, we need to recognize the frustration that we feel, use it to create institutionalized change that improves our way of doing things for the future, and give this community and its people the opportunity to believe in a better tomorrow.”

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