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To Members of the Fairfax Community,

Over the last four years, we've made tremendous strides towards building a fairer justice system that keeps our community safe. Our first term was marked by a flurry of new programs, policies, and practices: after inheriting an office and a system that hadn't evolved in nearly half a century, we needed to rapidly bring the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney (OCA) in line with Fairfax's present-day values.

Looking ahead, our top priority for a second term is continuing the progress we have made. The reforms we've implemented require resources and support to grow and continue serving the community for years to come:

1. **Data:** We use data to adhere to best practices in our office and hold ourselves accountable for the promises we've made to the community. In the coming term, we will integrate data into prosecutor decision-making for all key discretionary points (from pre-trial detention to sentencing). We will also put this data in the hands of managers and line personnel so that they are empowered to make the most fair and effective decisions for the community in real time. Only by fully integrating data into our daily operation can we deliver the just and effective legal system that Fairfax deserves.
2. **Diversion:** Our capstone diversion program, Taking Root, has received over 100 referrals – building on the 35 spots that were available in its first year – and is now on track to be the largest prosecutor-led diversion program in the Commonwealth. Our priority for the coming term is to better meet the clear demand in our community and ensure the program's sustainability. Bolstered by community support for these programs, we aim for the day when every defendant who might be an appropriate match for Taking Root has the opportunity to participate in this program.

Additionally, our office has launched a pilot restorative justice program for young adults. Restorative justice is a victim-centric practice of resolving cases outside of a traditional court, where trained mediators provide victims with an opportunity to

directly engage in an accountability process with the individual alleged to have committed the offense. Restorative justice programs tend to have high victim-satisfaction rates and low recidivism rates, and our aim is to grow this pilot into a more central component of our diversion offerings in the coming year.

By prioritizing diversion, we can address the root causes of lower-level crimes while maximizing the prosecutorial resources of our office for more serious offenses.

3. **Gun Violence:** We will use every tool we have to prevent gun violence, including doubling down on our Red Flag Law (ESRO) team to continue to remove firearms from imminently dangerous situations. Our Red Flag Team is the only one of its kind in the Commonwealth and uses data to track cases in real time to ensure we are maximizing our ability to get guns out of the hands of individuals who pose a danger to themselves or others. In partnership with FCPD, our office has handled more of these cases than any other jurisdiction in the Commonwealth. We are also establishing closer partnerships with local law enforcement and federal attorneys to continually tighten coordination on prosecuting gun crimes.
4. **Advocating for public safety:** Fairfax remains the safest community of its size anywhere in the country, but in our era of hyper-partisanship, some public officials distort the facts and weaponize victims of crime. I will always be an advocate for vulnerable communities and will use my office to stand up for Fairfax's values. This includes supporting legislation – from gun violence prevention to victims' rights – that will help build safety in our community.

I got into this work to build a justice system that better reflects our community's values. I'm encouraged by the progress we've made so far, but reforming institutions is long, hard work, and we are just at the beginning. I'm grateful to have earned your trust for another term as we endeavor to sustain our reforms for the future of Fairfax County.



Steve Descano

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