



**STEVE DESCANO**  
COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY

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

January 8, 2024

Contact: Laura Birnbaum, PIO

571-396-1179

**CA DESCANO AND SEN. KAINE CELEBRATE TAKING ROOT DIVERSION PROGRAM;  
ANNOUNCE NEW JOB TRAINING ELEMENT**

Fairfax, VA – Earlier today, CA Descano hosted a press event to celebrate the graduates of the OCA's flagship diversion program, Taking Root. Descano also announced a new culinary job training program, Pathfinder Kitchen, that will divert individuals out of the justice system and directly into restaurant jobs in the community.

Senator Tim Kaine delivered the keynote speech at the event and praised Taking Root for offering justice-involved individuals the opportunity to grow from their justice-involved past, describing the program as "innovative and strong." Sen. Kaine's office secured initial funding to launch the diversion program.

"The moments in your life when you learn the most are when you make mistakes," **Sen. Kaine** said. "Some people's mistakes wrap them up in the justice system, and that can stop them from achieving, learning, and growing in the way that we should all have the opportunity to do."

"Participants of our new Pathfinder Kitchen program will be able to get high-end training and certificates from local restaurants so that they can get started in the culinary world," **CA Descano** said. "This doesn't just help justice-involved individuals get out of the system, but also helps them build a great career that will provide for themselves and their families."

As the largest prosecutor-led diversion program in Virginia, Taking Root has become a national model for diversion programs that build community safety while addressing the root causes of criminal behavior. The program was launched by the Commonwealth Attorney's Office in partnership with Opportunities, Alternatives & Resources (OAR), a local nonprofit organization, and has had over 100 referrals and 20 graduates in its first year.

Starting this spring, Taking Root participants will have the opportunity to learn professional culinary skills at Mackenzie's Tunes and Tonics, and will receive employment in a Fairfax City restaurant upon graduation. This pilot program, which will begin in spring 2024, was funded by a grant from the City of Fairfax and will include wraparound services for participants conducted by the local nonprofit Britepaths.

“Today, you might want to change your life, but it might not work out tomorrow,” said **Lula Kelly, OAR’s Diversion Program Manager**. “But if you keep hoeing that row, eventually you’ll spring up roots that take you on the path to freedom.”

**Fairfax Chief of Police Kevin Davis** echoed Kelly’s sentiment, saying that “The vast majority of folks who come into contact with our justice system are going to return to our communities, so preparing them for a meaningful return is something we’re all committed to.”

###