

# Commonwealth of Virginia

## COUNTY OF FAIRFAX

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### **FAIRFAX COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY STEVE DESCANO ANNOUNCES DATA COLLABORATION WITH LEADING REFORM EXPERTS, ACADEMICS TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS DISPARITIES IN LOCAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

*Descano's office to partner with **Innovative Prosecution Consulting/American University's School of Public Affairs, the Vera Institute of Justice, and Measures for Justice.***

FAIRFAX COUNTY, VA – Today Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano announced that his office will engage with national criminal justice reform and data analysis experts to launch a data program aimed at identifying and addressing racial and socioeconomic disparities in Fairfax County's justice system. These reform experts will assist CA Descano's internal team in building a state-of-the-art data operation to identify potential disparate courthouse outcomes and strategies for mitigating them. In addition, the data program will be used to judge the efficacy of office policies and identify any potential efficiencies in the office's operations that may help Descano and his team better serve the community.

Descano's office will also participate in the Vera Institute of Justice's inaugural "Motion for Justice" cohort, a national partnership between Vera and select reformist prosecutor offices from across the country that was launched to help these offices measure and reduce racial disparities in their local legal systems. Through "Motion for Justice," Vera will contribute considerable additional expertise to Descano's data operation.

"When I took office, I promised this community I would urgently work toward the day when no neighbor's race, income, or zip code influenced how they were treated by our local justice system," said **Descano** of the new initiative. "We cannot change what we don't measure. This data will be the community's data, and I look forward to working with our community to address any disparities it surfaces."

"I am eager to work with my colleagues on the Justice Advisory Council to scale this important program," said **Maya Castillo**. Castillo is a **member of the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney's Justice Advisory Council**, a body of advocates from across the County that works with Descano's team to engage the community about the role of the office and solicit community members' feedback. "I look forward to collaborating with CA Descano and the various partners involved to share relevant data with the community and identify strategies for reducing any racial or socioeconomic disparities we may pinpoint in Fairfax County's justice system."

“I have witnessed the power prosecutors have to make our justice system more fair and equitable,” said **Allison Pierre, Founder and CEO of Innovative Prosecution Consulting who partners with American University**. Pierre served as a prosecutor in the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office and U.S. Attorney’s Office in DC. “With this effort, CA Descano is taking an important step toward equal treatment for community members who have traditionally been marginalized by the justice system. I am honored to partner with his team in this work.”

“As a former prosecutor, I know the unique and immense power that prosecutors wield. They can either perpetuate the injustices of the criminal legal system or work to rectify them,” said **Jami Hodge, Director of the Reshaping Prosecution initiative at the Vera Institute of Justice**. “Local prosecutors are on the frontlines of justice and thus have the responsibility and discretion to address the racial inequities inherent in the criminal legal system. We are far past time for prosecutors to operate through a racial equity lens and in partnership with the community, so I am thrilled to partner with the Office of the Fairfax County Commonwealth Attorney to tackle the deep-rooted injustices that continue to plague our communities.”

“I am eager to work with CA Descano and his team to determine the ways in which some Fairfax County residents may be treated differently by their local justice system based on race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status,” said **American University Professor of Justice, Law, and Criminology Julie Baldwin**. “Together, we can model and evaluate for communities across the region and nation the power of reformist prosecutors to help build a more equitable system.”

“Criminal justice data transparency is the best tool we have for ensuring policy change is informed and measurable,” said **Amy Bach, CEO of Measures for Justice**. “The team at Measures for Justice is excited to be a part of this important collaboration to ensure the Commonwealth Attorney’s data are being put to work for the betterment of the Fairfax community.”

CA Descano’s announcement comes on the heels of earlier reforms announced by the office that include the restructuring of the office to produce accountability around reforms, the cessation of the prosecution of marijuana possession, no longer requesting cash bail, and a suite of sentencing policies aimed at reducing mass incarceration, among others.

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