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**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement**

“Fairfax County, Virginia: The Dangerous Consequences of Sanctuary Policies”

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**Statement of Commonwealth’s Attorney Stephen Descano
Office of the Fairfax County Commonwealth’s Attorney**

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Jayapal, Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Raskin, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee.

As a West Point graduate, a federal prosecutor, and now the Commonwealth’s Attorney for Fairfax County, Virginia, I have devoted my life to public service and public safety. I was the first in my family to graduate from college, and I was inspired by West Point’s credo of providing a “lifetime of selfless service to the Nation.”

I was first elected as Commonwealth’s Attorney in 2019 on a promise to adopt smart-on-crime policies that prioritize the prosecution of violent crimes. I am proud of what we have accomplished. Fairfax County is one of the safest large communities in the country.

The public safety of Fairfax County motivates all our work. Our office has successfully prosecuted thousands of cases, including high-profile murders, sexual assaults, and other serious offenses. We have worked with our law enforcement partners to more effectively prosecute gun crimes. We expanded a diversion program for struggling veterans. And we spearheaded bipartisan, statewide reforms to better protect child victims and witnesses in partnership with a Republican governor.

Even in safe communities though, crime does happen, like the tragic murder of Stephanie Minter, whose mother, Cheryl, is here today. My heart goes out to the Minter family for their loss. I say that not only as the Commonwealth’s Attorney but also as a parent. I can assure you that my office is prosecuting the man responsible to the fullest extent of the law.

I have been asked to testify today about my office policies. I welcome any conversation about how to reduce and prevent violence. Unfortunately, I expect some will instead promote a false narrative that gets us no closer to real solutions that Americans deserve.

Let me be absolutely clear. My office does not provide sanctuary or safe harbor to undocumented immigrants. In fact, we routinely prosecute immigrants who commit crimes and we will continue to do so.

Our approach to prosecution of crime has helped make Fairfax County one of the safest jurisdictions of its size in the country. Last year, we had far fewer homicides than in almost any other major jurisdiction in the United States, including in states that many members of the Subcommittee represent.

Serious violent crime in Fairfax County is also lower than that of most other large jurisdictions. And Fairfax residents know it's safe; a Washington Post poll found that 94% of Northern Virginia residents reported feeling safe from crime in their neighborhood. And the citizens of Fairfax County have weighed in by re-electing me with 77% of the vote.

My office also works with our federal partners to prosecute crimes. Like many state and local prosecutors, my office has a policy of not assisting U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with federal civil immigration enforcement. We do not have the budget or personnel to enforce federal civil immigration law, and it is simply not our job. We handle 15,000 criminal cases each year with just 52 full-time attorneys and a limited budget.

Our policy of not diverting our resources to federal immigration enforcement also makes our community safer. Three in ten residents of Fairfax County are immigrants. When crimes occur, we need victims and witnesses, including members of our immigrant communities, to report those crimes and come to court to testify. If victims and witnesses believe my office will report them or their neighbors to ICE, they will not trust us and they will not provide the testimony we need to obtain convictions and get justice.

It is justice that my office is now seeking by prosecuting the defendant, Abdul Jalloh, in the tragic murder of Stephanie Minter. The system failed Ms. Minter, and we should all look for ways we can prevent tragedies like this in the future. That starts with understanding the facts.

The defendant was well known by ICE as early as 2018, when ICE held him in custody for nearly two years during the first Trump Administration, only to release him into the community. After that, my office worked closely with law enforcement to prosecute him and obtain convictions for his crimes, wherever possible and despite challenges in those cases. We are fully committed to holding the defendant accountable in this case.

As a local prosecutor, I will continue to focus on my job of prosecuting defendants who commit crimes in Fairfax County. In carrying out that role, my office makes case decisions based on the law, the evidence in the case, the interests of the victim, and in service of seeking justice and keeping our community safe.

I welcome your questions.