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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**COMMONWEALTH’S ATTORNEY’S RESTORATIVE JUSTICE TRAINING**

The Richmond Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office (“the Office”) has taken concrete steps to continue its ongoing progressive criminal justice reform agenda, which includes applying Restorative Justice principles to criminal cases. Restorative Justice is a process that allows victims and offenders to engage in a facilitated conversation about the harm the offender has caused. These “conferences” are designed to help the participants come to an agreement on how the offender can make amends. Conferences may also include other community members who have been affected, such as business owners, parents, law enforcement and witnesses. This voluntary process can be beneficial to victims because it gives them an opportunity to express directly to the offender how the victim has been harmed and what can be done to address their needs. The focus is on victim input, offender accountability and community healing, all of which lead to reducing recidivism and increasing public safety.

My Office has already begun utilizing Restorative Justice as an option for juvenile offenders through the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Services Unit. While the Mayor’s Task Force on Re-imagining Public Safety Report recognized the importance of using Restorative Justice practices as an alternative to conviction or incarceration, Restorative Justice is currently not a funded alternative for adult offenders in the City of Richmond. Nevertheless, the Office’s Community Justice Reform Unit identified a number of community members who are willing to volunteer their services as conference facilitators. The Office engaged the services of Dr. Lauren Abramson, who created the Community Conferencing Center in Baltimore, Maryland, to train 12 volunteers to serve as Restorative Justice facilitators. Mr. Iman Shabazz, the Office’s Policy Advisor for Community Engagement and Reform Initiatives, assisted Dr. Abramson during the training held on June 11-12, 2021.

Over the next 12 months, these facilitators will conduct conferences for cases that are identified as appropriate for Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice practices would not be appropriate in those cases where the offender continues to pose a danger to the victim or larger community, or where an offender requires more intensive services and supervision. In appropriate cases, victims and offenders will be consulted and asked if they are each willing to participate in the process. If either the victim or the offender declines to participate in the Restorative Justice process, then the case will proceed through the court system.

I am excited about the use of Restorative Justice as an alternative to the traditional resolution of criminal cases and I am encouraged by the enthusiasm of the community facilitators. I hope that this Restorative Justice Initiative will expand into a community-supported and city-funded alternative to conviction or incarceration that provides Richmond with the opportunity to address harm and promote healing throughout our city.