

Commonwealth of Virginia

COUNTY OF FAIRFAX

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STATEMENT FROM FAIRFAX COUNTY COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY STEVE DESCANO ON TODAY'S HEARING REGARDING EFFORT TO SECURE ELON WILSON'S RELEASE FROM PRISON FOLLOWING 20 MONTHS OF UNJUST INCARCERATION

FAIRFAX COUNTY, VA – Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano issued the following statement on today's hearing in Fairfax County Circuit Court regarding the case of Elon Wilson:

"I commend Judge Ortiz for stating today that he was "inclined" to release Elon Wilson from state custody.

The outcome of today's hearing constitutes a major step toward returning Mr. Wilson to his family and community after 20 months of unjust incarceration. I appreciate that Judge Ortiz insisted on a thorough approach and will be issuing an opinion letter along with his order in the coming days.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wilson's story is indicative of a destructive culture that characterized our criminal justice system for too long. A Washington, D.C. firefighter with a clean criminal record, Mr. Wilson was pulled over without proper cause by an officer with a history of unsupportable and racially disparate stops. The power of the state was then leveraged against him to improperly coerce him into a plea deal that stripped him of his freedom. Once I took office and became aware of his situation, I directed my team to do everything in our power – in concert with his defense team – to hasten his release and clear his conviction.

The bottom line is that Mr. Wilson was a victim of a racially biased and complacent status quo that valued convictions over justice – and I am committed to doing everything in my power to prevent such injustices in the future. That is why I immediately dismissed all of the pending cases attributed to the officer involved when we learned of this circumstance, and why we will take every possible action to remedy the 400+ convictions associated with him.

On behalf of the system that failed them, I want to also apologize to Mr. Wilson and his family. I cannot begin to imagine the pain they have experienced over these past 20 months. I can, however, assure them that my team is committed to fulfilling our role as an independent check on our criminal justice system and that we understand doing so starts with preventing Mr. Wilson's story from repeating itself."

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