

SVCC Collaborates with Local County Prosecutors on Alternative Sentencing Program

“As prosecutors we are always looking for sentencing alternatives. Probation and/or incarceration doesn't fit every case, but often these are the only options we have,” said Lezlie Green, Commonwealth’s Attorney for Brunswick County.

Southside Virginia Community College now offers a diversion program, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Attorneys of Brunswick, Mecklenburg, Lunenburg and Greenville counties. The program is for offenders between the ages of 18 through 25 and is designed as an alternative sentencing option for approved criminal offenses.

Diversion is an attempt to redirect, educate and rehabilitate young adults that commit and plead guilty to offenses that are approved by the local prosecutor for the diversion program. Diverting youth who have committed approved criminal offenses away from the system and towards community-based treatment and support options can be a more appropriate response than confinement, and a more productive way of addressing and preventing future criminal behavior.

Green noted, “The diversion program is a great example of tailoring available resources to fit the needs of the community - criminal justice needs and rehabilitation needs. Our goal is to move a person from a path which will likely lead to incarceration to a path which will likely lead to job stability and good citizenship.”

She also said, “SVCC heard our needs and built a program which addresses them, using resources already in place. This has resulted in a partnership between the college, community

corrections and the court house which will benefit not only Brunswick County but the entire SVCC service area”.

The mission of this program is to rehabilitate, redirect, and develop successful, productive, citizens for an ever-changing global society by using formal education, counseling, discipline and life skills development. Its goals are ***Personal Responsibility, Reducing Recidivism, Providing Services, Workforce Preparedness, and helping the students obtain Career Studies Certificate.***

Offenders can only participate in the program if referred by the local Commonwealth’s Attorney and the judge that has jurisdiction over their case. The program will consist of cohorts that begin the program and finish together. The frequency of when a cohort begins will be determined by the needs of the counties that are participating in the program.

Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, Alfonzo R. Seward, is the program head and various instructors will provide the classroom content.

Seward said “This is an awesome opportunity if the individual that is accepted into the program takes advantage of it and works to complete it successfully.”