

Cabral hopes for a second term

The Suffolk County Sheriff makes plans for the future and reflects on the past

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It's an old story now, Andrea Cabral's start as Suffolk County Sheriff.

It seems everyone remembers when Cabral, the first woman, and first African American, was elected in 2004, after being appointed in 2003 by Rep. Governor Jane Swift. Everyone recalls the promises she made then—to be transparent, fair and hard working. To practice ethics, not patronage.

And with Cabral at the helm, the old sheriff's department, rife with politically motivated hiring, ineffective programs and prisoner abuse, has become a thing of the past. Instead, re-entry programs, education classes and partnerships are now the norm, and Cabral spends her days in her office or attending events around the Boston, meeting the youth she hopes she'll never see in her correctional facility.

For many, Cabral was a breath of fresh air when Suffolk County needed it, and this November 4, residents will have the chance to vote for her to stay in office for six more years.

"The first term was really about massive reform and change and professionalizing the institution," Cabral recalled in a recent phone interview. "The vision was really more restorative. In the next term, the vision is more about reform of corrections versus reform of these particular correctional facilities."

That vision would mean looking at the way facilities are run, building a greater capacity for inmates to transition back to the community and decreasing the number of people in



Photo: Courtesy of Sheriff's office

the jail, which now houses around 1600 men and 150 women on a given day.

"We have slightly fewer than we had summertime last year, at least at the House of Corrections," Cabral said, lending some of the credit to the re-entry programs she plans to focus more on in the next six years, if reelected.

"We do think the programs are having an effect. We are trying to measure it...to see who came back and who didn't," she said.

Before Cabral, men and women in the correctional facility attended the same re-entry programs. But "gender responsive" programs have been a hallmark of Cabral's tenure.

The Community Re-Entry for Women (CREW) program was started by Cabral in 2004. With a full staff of clinicians and corrections officers, the program teaches incarcerated women skills they can use once they get out, and provides follow up for two years after their release. The program has paired with organizations in the South End and beyond to deliver these services. The men's program, the Boston Re-Entry Initiative, focuses on high-impact players, who are believed to have a 100 percent recidivism rate.

While the CREW program is much smaller, it is also mandatory.

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Cabral said one of her regrets was that she was not able to make the men's program mandatory over the last six years - she'd had no place to build an accountability unit, where privileges are stripped away in response to the decision to not participate.

"If I can't find the space," Cabral said of her hopes for the next six years, "I'd like to be able to come up with a mechanism to make it mandatory anyway."

Kim Nuttall, who helps run the CREW program at Project Place, a South End non-profit that helps the homeless, said the re-entry program had seen a great deal of success. With an 11% national job placement rate for women just let out of prison, Project Place has seen a 32% rate. And when the program was in dire need of money - the grant writer the Sheriff's office lent them couldn't garner funds - Cabral put the department's funds into the program for the time being.

"She really is supportive what we've been doing. A vast majority of the population we serve lives in Boston and in Suffolk county, and this is a program that works for them. And I think that's her priority," Nuttall said.

ABCD president and CEO John Drew, who has worked with the Cabral in the past several years, said that he'd been around for seven sheriffs and before Cabral, he couldn't remember one he liked.

"It was new era," he said of her

election.

Drew explained that Cabral had been involved in the Second Chance at Success program, run out of the ABCD's South End location. Meant to help 17- to 24-year-olds move on with their lives after receiving a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI), Cabral helped in the program's planning process and was a speaker at the program's March graduation.

"She's much more than the jail. She actually works in the community and works with folks," Drew said.

Cabral will face opposition in this year's election in Hassan A. Smith, a man who, though passionate about his own ability to work with the community as Sheriff, has a checkered past.

At 16, Smith murdered 21-year-old new father Jeffrey Booker in a parking lot in Roxbury. After spending two years with the Department of Youth Services, his record was, in his words, "expunged," which made it possible for him to get a job at the sheriff's department as a corrections officer.

In 1997, it became popular knowledge that Hassan was a convicted killer and people were outraged. Smith's plan to become a police officer after ten years as a corrections officer was derailed by many who tried to block his attempt and around the same time, multiple complaints of sexual harassment were filed against him, resulting in his being made to leave the department. He said in a recent interview

with the South End news that the sexual harassment charges were staged.

Smith said that he understands why people focus on his past, but he hoped residents would also look to his possible future and his ability to do better than Cabral.

"I'm not trying to downplay what I did when I was 15," he said, "but we have a situation where we have a chance to do better," he said.

Cabral, when asked about Smith, doesn't seem worried. Nevertheless, she is sure to mention in a political office, you can never get too comfortable - she knows she has to work to be elected.

Asked if there was anything she wasn't prepared for when elected to Sheriff in 2004 that she's ready for now, Cabral paused.

"I think I'm still surprised at the enormity of it all - the size of the department, the deficits of the population, the way crime impacts the people who are victimized by it," she listed off. "Some days, it can be a lot to wrap your head around."

Cabral said that the size of the system also meant that she had the ability to make a sizable difference.

"I didn't anticipate for a minute that... I would have an opportunity and a voice in the context of this job to go beyond what happens in this facility, and try to effect more change in a more preventative way," she said. "I didn't expect that all, but I'm glad I've had that opportunity."