



**Common Ground:  
A Progress Report of the Suffolk  
County Sheriff's Department**

**2004-2010**

*Summary*

**Andrea J. Cabral - Sheriff**

## SHERIFF'S MESSAGE:



On November 29, 2002, I was sworn in as the 30<sup>th</sup> High Sheriff of Suffolk County. On October 15, 2002, a 77-page report was released by a Commission that was headed by former United States Attorney Donald K. Stern and assembled by former Governor Jane Swift. The report was exceedingly critical of the Department's management and many of its policies, practices and procedures. Included among the report's findings was the need for new strong and competent leadership, new and improved training for correctional officers, consistent implementation of Department standards and practices, and an end to patronage and politically motivated hiring and promotions.

Within a year of my appointment, I released our first report detailing the substantial progress we had made in addressing the concerns expressed and implementing the recommendations made by the Stern Commission. As I conclude my first full term of office and as part of a continuing commitment to public transparency and accountability, we are releasing our second report: ***Common Ground: a Progress Report of the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department***. We are pleased that the past 6 years have been most productive and we have made advances that reach far beyond the recommendations of the Commission.

By replacing past hiring and promotions practices with merit-based policies that are accessible and fair, we have improved morale and created a work environment that rewards productive performance. In 2004, we established this Department's first training academy, located in the city of Chelsea, which is now recognized throughout the Commonwealth for its professionalism and quality. In addition to a 12-week academy training for new recruits, all custody and non-custody employees receive yearly in-service training which provides them the tools they need to deal with a very large population that is diverse in every particular way and presents with challenging behavioral, emotional and mental health issues.

I believe strongly that corrections at the county level offer the most effective opportunity for change in an offender's life. For that reason and because I take my responsibility to enhance public safety seriously, we place a very specific focus on the rehabilitation of the men and women in our custody. We have significantly improved our educational/vocational training, medical and mental health services, substance abuse treatment and re-entry programming. In fact, some of our programs have been recognized as national and statewide models.

The impact of these programs cannot be understated. Not only are they effective at reducing recidivism, which makes Suffolk County's communities safer, they equip ex-offenders with many of the skills they need to build more positive, productive lives. To help bridge the transition between incarceration and release, our re-entry programs also work with local businesses and our community partners to match program graduates with employment opportunities.

Another important part of our public safety responsibility involves external outreach and partnership with Suffolk County's communities. In addition to sponsoring community forums on issues like truancy, the challenges of an increasing female offender population and the practical impact of criminal offender record information (CORI), our successful JailBrake program now serves boys and girls. JailBrake is a deterrent program. In other words, it educates at-risk teens from schools and youth service programs across Suffolk County about the realities of life in jail and encourages them to avoid making the kinds of choices that frequently result in arrest and incarceration.

Through our Choice Program, specially trained officers visit Suffolk County schools and educate students about the Department's public safety role, alternative ways to resolve conflict, civic responsibility and making good choices. The Choice Program curriculum is constantly refreshed and updated to ensure relevance to the issues faced by today's youth. Each year, our officers and civilian employees also participate in hundreds of community meetings and events that benefit children, teens, seniors, and other adult residents of Suffolk County.

Strong leadership is the key to the success of any agency. I am truly fortunate to have chiefs, superintendents, executive and mid-level managers who provide such leadership. Together, we have successfully guided the Department away from the mismanagement and dysfunction of the past and toward its present place as model in the corrections community. I am especially proud of the excellent daily work of our command staff and over 1,000 employees, whose competence and professionalism keep the largest Sheriff's Department in New England running smoothly.

My goal is for this Department to always merit the public's trust and confidence. I hope the contents of this report illustrate our continuing effort to do just that.

Sincerely,



Sheriff Andrea J. Cabral



## Suffolk County Sheriff's Department

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### **Common Ground: A Progress Report of the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department (2004-2009)**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department is the largest sheriff's department in the Commonwealth and the 30<sup>th</sup> largest in the United States. It has 1,051 employees, including executive managers, corrections officers, investigators, educators, health care providers, caseworkers and administrative staff, whose primary responsibility is to provide safe care, custody, control and rehabilitative support for approximately 2,700 offenders daily. The Department's two main facilities are the Nashua Street Jail (NSJ) and the Suffolk County House of Correction (HOC). Its average operating budget is \$122 million.

Andrea J. Cabral, Esq. is the 30<sup>th</sup> Sheriff in Suffolk County's history and the Commonwealth's first female sheriff. Appointed in 2002 by Governor Jane Swift to complete the term of her predecessor, Sheriff Cabral was elected in 2004 to a six-year term.

Approximately one month before Sheriff Cabral was sworn into office, a report was issued by an independent commission tasked with conducting a full review of Department operations. The Stern Commission – led by former United States Attorney Donald K. Stern under the direction of Governor Swift – detailed multiple leadership and other failures within the Department's management structure, practices and procedures, and offered more than 75 separate recommendations to improve conditions within the Department.

Following her first year in office, Sheriff Cabral released a report citing the significant progress that had been made toward addressing the concerns and implementing the recommendations made by the Stern Commission.

Now, at the close of her first term, Sheriff Cabral is releasing a second report that furthers her commitment to public transparency and highlights a level of progress that reaches far beyond the recommendations of the Stern Commission. ***Common Ground: A Progress Report of the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department (2004-2009)*** details the significant reforms and improvements made during her tenure.

A PDF of the report can be found on the Department's website at:  
[www.scsdma.org](http://www.scsdma.org).

## **MAJOR REFORMS AND IMPROVEMENTS**

A multitude of improvements have been made to the Department's facilities, the internal and external operations of the NSJ and the HOC. Among these improvements are significant changes to policies, procedures and practices.

### **HIRING**

- ◆ The SCSD uses a selective hiring process that includes some of the most stringent pre-employment requirements in corrections. As emphasis is now placed on maturity and professionalism, an increase of the minimum hiring age was made, from 18 to 21 years of age. Applicants with college degrees are preferred and all are initially screened using criteria that include a thorough review of past job history and references, a character assessment, and a criminal history check.
- ◆ Potential hires must meet additional standards; including Testing for Adult Basic Literacy (TABE), an assessment of written skills through essay questions also designed to assess mindset and attitude, a physical fitness exam, an interview by a panel of custody command supervisors and human resource professionals, hair sample drug testing, and an extensive background investigation. Each applicant who successfully meets our standards is then interviewed by Sheriff Cabral. Sheriff Cabral reviews each applicant's file and makes the decision whether the applicant will be enrolled in our training academy.

### **PROMOTIONS**

- ◆ All promotions are based on merit. Custody staff must pass a written exam, comprehensive interview, review of disciplinary history and peer review in order to achieve higher rank. For the first time in the Department's history, all staff members of the Department – custody and non-custody – receive mandatory annual performance appraisals.

### **TRAINING**

The Department's Training Division provides in-service training for all custody and non-custody staff and academy training for officer candidates. Some of that training includes:

- ◆ Twelve weeks of academy instruction for every officer candidate, including classes: in the use of force continuum, firearm safety and handling, suicide prevention, ethics and professionalism, courtroom testimony, inmate education and programming, CORI and inmate rights and responsibilities, contraband control, fire safety, CPR, sexual harassment, cross-gender supervision and report writing; and.
- ◆ Mandatory non-custody training in CPR, first-aid, emergency plans, fire safety, suicide prevention, report writing, classification, contraband control, and cultural sensitivity.
- ◆ To assist staff in maintaining optimum mental and physical health the SCSD is one of only a few law enforcement agencies in the Commonwealth that provides an in-house, off-site Employee Assistance Program (EAP.)
- ◆ SCSD is the only Sheriff's Department that includes a specific training on transgender awareness in its curriculum. This workshop is for both uniformed and non-uniformed staff

and promotes sensitivity and professionalism in the care, custody and control of transgendered inmates and pre-trial detainees.

## **MUTUAL AID**

- ◆ SCSD has an expanded mutual aid program with other law enforcement agencies, including the Boston and Chelsea Police Departments, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Police, State Police and others, to whom we provide assistance, support and share information critical to public safety initiatives. We also make our Training Academy available to such agencies for instruction in forced cell moves, riot and crowd control, K-9 training and more.
- ◆ The Disaster Task Force is a collaborative effort involving the Sheriff's Department, Boston Fire Department, Department of Homeland Security, and Boston Emergency Medical Services. It was created to prepare for weather catastrophes, plane crashes, power outages, work stoppages, inmate uprisings, terrorist attacks and more.

## **INMATE EDUCATION AND PROGRAM SERVICES**

### **Education:**

Vast improvement has been made to both Education and Program Services for inmates and pre-trial detainees. Particular emphasis has been placed on re-entry programming. These improvements include:

- ◆ Adult Basic Education, featuring a Literacy 1 component – a reading class for students who do read at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level or below – and a Literacy 2 component for students who read at a 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade level;
- ◆ General Education Degree (GED) classes with on-site testing four times per year, an Adult Diploma Program (ADP), Special Education (SPED) classes for students under 22 years of age who have been diagnosed with learning differences, Title I classes, and Advanced Math classes;
- ◆ A resume writing class that provides employment resources and teaches inmates how to interview successfully;
- ◆ Classes in English as a Second Language (ESOL);
- ◆ Classes in parenting that focus on discipline, nurturing, nutrition, and developmental issues;
- ◆ A “Parents Read Aloud” program in which an inmate is recorded while reading a children’s book aloud. The recording and book are sent home to the child, who can then read along to sound of the parent’s voice;
- ◆ Freedom from Violence is a very effective, nationally recognized program that focuses on the root causes of violence and provides training in alternatives to violence;
- ◆ Classes provided by and through partnership with Bunker Hill Community College to provide inmates with classes that offer college credit, including Introductory Psychology,

English and College Seminar. Plans are in place to offer some developmental classes in math and writing as well as a course in Sociology;

- ◆ An Entrepreneur Class based on the Junior Achievement business model. Participants receive instruction in finance, advertising and management and how to create a business plan; and
- ◆ The Department also offers writing workshops, art and poetry classes and a book club to increase education and provide alternative, creative, non-aggressive avenues of expression.

### **Additional vocational and skill-based education offered at the House of Correction**

The Department also offers classes to inmates sentenced to the House of Correction, which include:

- ◆ Basic Keyboarding;
- ◆ Desktop Publishing;
- ◆ Computer Literacy and Advanced Computer Literacy; class for male inmates;
- ◆ Printing Program and Graphics Technology; and a
- ◆ Food Sanitation Certificate Program.

### **Program Services**

Throughout her first term, Sheriff Cabral has focused on providing timely, comprehensive and coordinated dental, medical and mental health services to an average daily population of approximately 2,700 inmates and pre-trial detainees. Among the improvements:

- an increase in the number of on-site services including dialysis treatment; intravenous medications, sutures and physical therapy;
  - an electronic medical records system;
  - an improved Consumer Quality Initiatives System; and
  - a new, web-based pharmacy ordering system that ensures timely delivery of much needed medications.
- ◆ Mental Health services are now delivered by specialized forensic clinicians. Along with routine counseling and psychiatric services, there has been an increased focus on group counseling and coordinating services with social services staff. Additionally, the mental health team has collaborated with several local universities to offer competitive fellowships and internship opportunities to graduate level students.
  - ◆ Medical and mental health staff coordinate with local community providers, DPH, DMH, and the Boston Public Health Commission to ensure continuity of care for inmates once they are released. Partnerships with the both Whittier Street Community Health Center and the South End Community Health Center have allowed for coordinated discharge planning. Whittier Street in particular has been instrumental in enrolling inmates in MassHealth's

“Virtual Gateway” system. This system allows for staff to apply online for MassHealth membership for pre-release inmates to ensure that they continue to receive necessary medical care and mental health counseling, post-release.

- ◆ As part of her effort to increase re-entry programming for inmates and reduce recidivism, Sheriff Cabral created the Common Ground Institute (CGI) – a 10-week vocational skill-based program that teaches carpentry, custodial maintenance, painting and landscaping. Class participants also receive OSHA certification during the academic module by completing a 10-hour course for general industrial safety & health standards. CGI is a national model in corrections and is the first program in a Massachusetts correctional institution to be designated a certified apprenticeship program by the Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development.

- ◆ The Community Works Program (CWP) is for low-risk inmates who have received vocational training through CGI and provides community restitution by improving and maintaining public land. Each day, supervised CWP inmates are transported into Suffolk County to utilize their newly learned skills by making improvements to libraries, schools and other public grounds. This program also saves Suffolk County communities hundreds of thousands of tax dollars on each completed project.

- ◆ In 2005, Sheriff Cabral implemented mandatory, gender-specific inmate programming for female inmates and pre-trial detainees. This programming addresses the different issues and barriers to post-release success that confront female ex-offenders. Using a comprehensive intake process, programs that target the specific deficits (education, substance abuse, unemployment, trauma-based mental health issues, etc.) and solid discharge planning, every female inmate and pre-trial detainee has access to effective pre-and post-release programs and services, including post-release housing and employment.

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

The work of the SCSD provides a tremendous opportunity for positive impact on the communities of Suffolk County. Sheriff Cabral has created and implemented a series of programs and services designed to reach out to the citizens of Boston, Winthrop, Chelsea, and Revere and improve public safety in their neighborhoods and schools.

- ◆ The Choice Program encourages students to respect themselves and others as they prepare for their futures. Using a set curriculum, specially trained correction officers visit Suffolk County schools and create a dialogue with students on topics like: peer pressure, behavior choices, setting goals, self respect, how government works, the importance of civic engagement and the effects of a criminal history on future success.

- ◆ The JailBrake Program targets high-risk youth and offers a realistic glimpse of life behind bars. It is designed to help “put the brakes” on the flow of young people into juvenile detention centers and adult jails.

- ◆ The Department also offers a free Ident-A-Youth program that provides Suffolk County parents with a record of their child’s fingerprints. A fingerprint record helps authorities locate and identify missing children.

- ◆ The **Common Ground** cable television show was introduced by Sheriff Cabral in June of 2006. This program spreads the Department's message of public safety and crime prevention and keeps viewers abreast of what's happening in the Department and their communities. Each week Department managers, members of social and civic organizations and employees from city, state, and federal agencies are interviewed for the show. Now expanded to a full hour on Boston's community cable station Boston Neighborhood Network (BNN) the show can be seen in not only Boston, but also in Chelsea, Winthrop, and Revere.

- ◆ SCSD provides Suffolk County Seniors with a free medical identification card that provides important information to emergency first responders when the holder is unable to communicate. The ID cards include a photo of the cardholder, his or her name, address, blood type, medical history, the name and phone number of the cardholder's physician, an emergency contact and other pertinent information as the holder requests.

Other community outreach programs offered by Department include:

- ❖ *The Common Ground Newsletter*, in print and online, which educates and informs the general public about the functions of the Department and the accomplishments of its employees;
- ❖ *Not Beyond Hope*, a mini-magazine that features art, prose and poetry created by inmates and detainees;
- ❖ The Honor Guard, which represents the Department at a variety of ceremonies, sporting events, wakes and funerals, and memorial events; and
- ❖ A public safety publication and brochure program that distributes helpful information to Suffolk County citizens at local events, neighborhood meetings and functions.

## **CAPITAL PROJECTS AND FACILITY MAINTENANCE**

SCSD's facilities have undergone extensive upgrades and improvements, which include:

- ◆ Installation of over 400 interior and exterior cameras, which greatly enhance the security and safety of both staff and inmates;
- ◆ Repair of roofing at both the NSJ and the HOC as well as the complete reconstruction of the Nashua Street Jail entrance and handicap access ramp;
- ◆ Repair and replacement of door control panels, fire panels, and sallyport door motors at both the HOC and NSJ;
- ◆ Purchase of new Automated External Defibrillators, which give immediate instructions to aid Department staff in administering emergency CPR care to inmates, detainees and staff;
- ◆ Installation of the En-Gauge system, a fire safety program that electronically monitors the placement and viability of extinguishers throughout the NSJ and HOC using a series of automatic scans which send the data directly to a monitoring station within the facilities;
- ◆ Department-wide upgrade of the transportation fleet with new transport vans – redesigned and modified by a member of the Department's staff – that now maximize space, increase safety and provide improved climate control for inmates and detainees during transport; and

- ◆ Grant-funded procurement of 280 new body-armor vests for NSJ and HOC deputy sheriffs who transport inmates to court, hospitals and other facilities and provide mutual aid to other law enforcement agencies.

Other important information included in this report:

- ◆ The Sheriff's Investigative Division (SID) has professionalized, streamlined and consolidated operations, standardized background investigation protocols, and reestablished the lines of communication between the Department and external law enforcement agencies. This has strengthened the flow of reliable information, significantly increased the number of cases solved and provided a much higher level of accountability for staff, inmates and detainees.

- ◆ The Civil Process Division has improved its efficiency and risen to the challenge of processing some 10,500 additional documents annually throughout the years between 2003 to 2008.

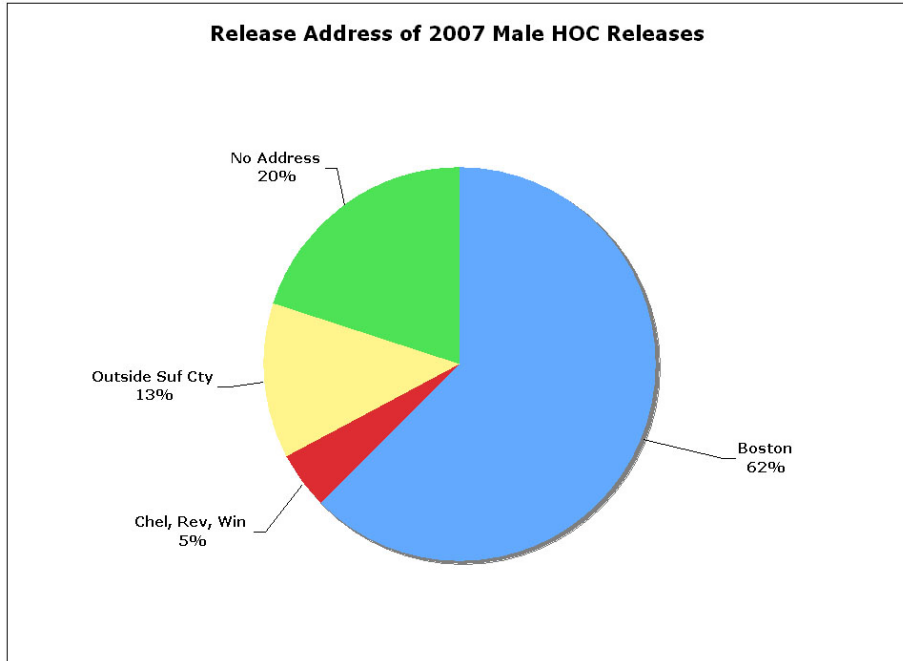
- ◆ The Financial Services Division provides prompt, efficient management of accounts payable, contracts, inmate accounts, procurement of goods and services, grants, and the Department budget.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department has undergone enormous change in the last six years. The major reforms promised at the beginning of Sheriff Cabral's term have been achieved and we are pleased to enjoy a greatly restored level of public confidence in our work. This report shows that a great deal can be accomplished in a relatively short time and gives us hope that we can make even greater progress in the years ahead. Whatever challenges confront us in the future, we meet them confidently as a stronger, more transparent and more professional institution.

**STATISTICALLY SPEAKING:**

The majority of male offenders completing their sentences at the Suffolk County House of Correction return to the City of Boston, with a smaller number being released into Chelsea, Winthrop and Revere and even fewer returning to communities outside of Suffolk County.



Using the self-reported data supplied by male offenders sentenced to the Suffolk County House of Correction, it is revealed that the majority of sentenced inmates have failed to graduate high school having completed a maximum of 11 years of high school education.

