

## LISS-RIORDAN JOINS UTEC DISCUSSION



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Democratic attorney general hopeful Shannon Liss-Riordan visits UTEC in Lowell for a discussion on Wednesday. At left is UTEC Senior Director of DEI Amanda Kuffoh.

### Candidate pledges ‘a path away from involvement in the criminal justice system’

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**LOWELL** » Wednesday morning’s visit by Shannon Liss-Riordan, Democratic candidate for attorney general, brought a stir to UTEC, Lowell’s young adult support network.

The Warren Street facility was the venue for Liss-Riordan’s introduction, tour and interview, where she drew a paral-

lel between the AG’s and UTEC’s roles in addressing crime in Massachusetts.

“As AG I will fight to give people a voice and a hope for a better future,” Liss-Riordan said. “Similar to what UTEC’s mission is, providing a path away from involvement in the criminal justice system.”

UTEC’s expressed objective is to offer alternatives to peo-

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Democratic attorney general hopeful Shannon Liss-Riordan, center, poses for a group photo during a visit to UTEC in Lowell.

ple aged 17 to 22 who have been challenged by hardship and involvement in the criminal justice system. As part of that mission, all participants learn and apply valuable life skills and vocational planning, while earning a paycheck as part of the workforce.

It was that workforce who organized, facilitated and structured Liss- Riordan's visit, including serving as tour guides, toastmaster, video producer, talk- show anchor and food preparers.

After a tour of the 20,000- square-foot building, Liss- Riordan joined workforce members, street workers and others for a roundtable meet- and- greet as each person explained their role. Culminating in a pod- cast- quality oneon- one interview between Liss-Riordan and workforce member Desiree Thornton, the candidate offered candid answers to questions that are germane to young adults and disenfranchised members of the community.

The issues presented in the prepared queries included gun violence, home-lessness, incarceration and housing programs. Liss-Riordan explained her plan to implement a tenant- advocacy department within the AG's office if she wins the seat.

Police department transparency, holding "gunmanufacturers accountable for the devastation" and cannabis-related crimes being erased from people's records were among the topics.

" I support expunging criminal records of all cannabis- related offenses," she said, " and to compensate people for the damage done for engaging in something that is now legal."

That the entire 90- minute event went smoothly is no accident. UTEC has been holding candidate series for many years.

" We have hosted City Council candidates, School Committee, mayoral, congressional and gubernatorial candidates," said UTEC CEO Gregg Croteau.

By introducing the young people to political aspirants, it helps them understand and get involved with the civic processes and encourage voting, he said.

On Monday, UTEC welcomed one of Liss- Riordan's opponents in the primary race, Andrea Campbell. Next week, candidate Quentin Palfrey will get the same welcome.

UTEC's arms reach throughout the Merrimack Valley, including similar

operations in Lawrence and Haverhill. In Lowell, the main headquarters is flanked by the social hub, where other skills are taught, including tutoring for High School Equivalency Testing and guidance down one of four career- path options that often lead to a lifelong vocation. There is also free child care so parents can work toward their goals without the financial burden of private care.

One of those parents was interview host Thornton, who has discovered not only a career path but also the self- confidence needed to speak on camera with influential people.

" I want to be a public speaker to tell my story and help other people tell theirs," Thornton said. " My peers chose me to ask the questions because of my confidence."

She has hosted several candidates across many political races over the three years she has been involved with UTEC.

Liss- Riordan is a Texas native and Harvard Law School graduate who specializes in labor law, fighting for employees' rights against corporations that exploit workers. If she wins the seat, she will become the state's third consecutive woman to hold that office, following Martha Coakley and Maura Healey, who is running for governor