

## Candidate Hunger Action Challenge

# Shahram Shariati



Running for:  
**San Francisco Mayor**

*"By adopting Austin's food waste laws, which require all restaurants and food businesses to donate surplus organic food, we could feed people with fresh, healthy meals and reduce reliance on processed foods laden with unhealthy preservatives."*



## What do you think are the root causes of hunger, and what do you see as the government's role in addressing them?

I believe the root cause of hunger is affordability.

San Francisco is known for having one of the highest costs of living in the United States, particularly when it comes to housing. On average, residents of San Francisco spend a significant portion of their income on shelter (rent or mortgage). Here's a breakdown of the situation:

As of recent data:

Average Rent: The median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in San Francisco is around \$3,000–\$3,500 per month.

Median Household Income: The median household income in San Francisco is around \$120,000–\$130,000 annually.

To calculate the percentage of income spent on rent:

A household making \$130,000 per year would have a monthly income of approximately \$10,833.

If that household is paying \$3,500 in rent, this amounts to about 32% of their monthly income.

For many residents, the percentage can be even higher, particularly for lower-income households or those paying more for housing. The general rule of thumb is to spend no more than 30% of income on housing, but in San Francisco, it is common for people to exceed this, with some spending 40% or more on shelter.

Most people in San Francisco are unaware that there are affordable housing programs available to them, allowing them to spend 30% or less of their income on housing in the city. My goal is to promote these existing programs and make them easier for people to enroll in. I took advantage of one of these programs 8 years ago and was able to purchase a brand-new 2-bedroom, 2-bathroom condo for \$300,000, with the government providing \$45,000 in down payment assistance. At the time, my salary was \$70,000, and I hold three college degrees in engineering and business. Thanks to this program, my total monthly housing costs are \$2,250, which is significantly less than the \$3,000/month rent for a market-rate one-bedroom apartment.

Due to the lack of awareness about this program, I decided to obtain my real estate license and have been helping San Francisco residents become homeowners for the past 8 years.

Austin, Texas, is the only city in the nation with a law that prohibits restaurants from wasting food. Austin's Universal Recycling Ordinance requires all restaurants and food businesses to divert organic materials from landfills by donating surplus food. If San Francisco implemented such a law, we could feed thousands of people in the city with food that would otherwise be thrown away.

## If elected, how would you ensure coordination between the multiple government departments that fund and administer food assistance programs?

If elected, I plan to create a documentary series on San Francisco politics where every elected and appointed official, including myself, is on camera throughout my term as mayor. Each episode will focus on a different issue plaguing our city, such as hunger. The documentary will expose the bottlenecks in our system, allowing us to address and fix them. We will then release a follow-up episode highlighting the changes implemented to improve the system. With the whole world watching, transparency will help eradicate corruption within the government.

There is no excuse for San Francisco, one of the richest cities in the world, with a relatively small population and landmass, to experience homelessness and hunger.

## Studies have shown food can be medicine. If elected, how do you plan to use your position to improve food-related health disparities?

San Francisco is home to some of the healthiest restaurants and food businesses in the world. By adopting Austin's food waste laws, which require all restaurants and food businesses to donate surplus organic food, we could feed people with fresh, healthy meals and reduce reliance on processed foods laden with unhealthy preservatives.

## The San Francisco-Marin Food Bank will be closing all Food Bank-run Pop-Up Pantries by June 2025 due to cuts in government pandemic funding. This program currently serves 11,400 households, 75% of which are estimated to lose access to free weekly groceries when the funding ends. If elected, what would you do to ensure that all San Franciscans have access to nutritious foods?

As of recent data, San Francisco is home to approximately 4,000 to 5,000 restaurants and over 7,000 food businesses in total. This includes a wide variety of establishments such as cafes, food trucks, and catering services. The exact number fluctuates as new businesses open and others close, especially following the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. San Francisco's vibrant food scene, combined with its tourism industry, supports a large number of food-related businesses for its size.

By adopting Austin's food waste laws, which require all restaurants and food businesses to donate surplus organic food, 11,000 new meals could be generated each day if each business creates just one meal from their surplus food! I would also like to partner with the European company, Too Good To Go, which sells surplus food from restaurants and food businesses that would otherwise go to waste, to the public for \$5 or less. The company already has a presence in San Francisco, with partnerships with hundreds of local businesses. I have used this service many times, which has saved me money on food and allowed me to try new restaurants.