

Candidate Hunger Action Challenge

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Running for:
San Francisco Board of Supervisors, District 3

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

The root causes of hunger are deeply interconnected with poverty, income inequality, lack of affordable housing, and insufficient wages. At its core, hunger is due to systemic divergent income and cost of living. For the past several decades, the average U.S. housing cost burden has been growing at 1% higher than average income annually. Many individuals in our community are forced to choose between paying rent and buying food, which exacerbates food insecurity.

The government plays a critical role in addressing hunger by ensuring access to food assistance programs, such as CalFresh and WIC, and by funding initiatives that tackle poverty and unemployment. However, beyond assistance programs, it is vital for the government to invest in long-term solutions like affordable housing, higher minimum wages, and comprehensive healthcare to address the underlying issues causing food insecurity.

I believe that hunger is not just an issue of scarcity but also one of equity, which is why government policies must address systemic barriers that prevent low-income families from accessing nutritious food. This includes supporting local food banks and improving access to healthy food in underserved communities.

In San Francisco's District 3, the root causes of hunger are tied to rising housing costs, low wages in service-sector jobs, and the high cost of living, which disproportionately affect working-class families, seniors, and immigrant communities. Many residents, in neighborhoods such as lower Polk and downtown lack fresh food options and stores where residents of SROs can use their EBT. In Chinatown, one of the densest extremely low-income neighborhoods, food pantries often provide food that is not culturally sensitive to the Asian diet. In this case, while assistance is provided, it does not necessarily meet the food needs of the population.

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

If elected, I will fully support the Food Security Task Force's 2024 recommendations. In particular, I believe we need to continue investing adequate City resources to support equitable and coordinated solutions to food security, and keep investing in infrastructure to increase the coordination of public resources so that they are effectively reaching those in need.

Additionally, I would push for better data-sharing systems among departments to track the impact of food assistance programs and identify gaps in services. By leveraging technology, we can better coordinate efforts across departments and make sure that eligible families are automatically enrolled in multiple assistance programs without unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles.

Collaboration with non-profit organizations and local food banks will also be key to ensuring that government efforts are supplemented by grassroots initiatives, providing a safety net for those who might fall through the cracks of traditional programs.

Particularly in the Chinatown community and other ethnic communities, I would like to start a neighborhood food pantry that provides ethnically appropriate foods to prevent further food waste and to better serve our community members.

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

I fully support the concept that food can be medicine and this is a concept embedded in the Chinese tradition. To improve food-related health disparities, I will further advocate for policies that integrate nutrition into public health care, such as making it easier for community-based organizations to partner with CalAIM on food access. This includes expanding programs like "Food is Medicine," which provides medically tailored meals for individuals with chronic illnesses.

In District 3, where we have a significant senior population, it is especially important to ensure that individuals have access to easy to digest, healthy, nutritious meals to manage conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. I will work to secure funding for community-based organizations that provide meals designed for specific health needs, and will push for partnerships between hospitals, healthcare providers, and local food programs.

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?

If elected, I would prioritize the following actions to ensure all San Franciscans have access to nutritious foods, even after these pop-up pantries close:

Increase Local Funding for Food Assistance Programs: I will advocate for the City of San Francisco to step in and fill the funding gap created by the loss of federal pandemic relief. This will include pushing for additional allocations in the city budget for food assistance programs, prioritizing areas most impacted by the pantry closures, such as District 3.

Strengthen Partnerships with Community Organizations: The success of food assistance programs in District 3 has often relied on the collaboration between local government and trusted community organizations. I would work closely with organizations like Self-Help for the Elderly, CCDC, North Beach Citizens, and Cameron House to develop alternative food distribution and food pantry models that continue to serve the affected populations.

Expand Enrollment in CalFresh and Other Benefits: I would focus on expanding CalFresh enrollment, particularly in under-enrolled communities like the large immigrant population in Chinatown. By working with multilingual outreach programs and local service providers, we can ensure that eligible residents are able to access monthly benefits that help them purchase fresh, culturally appropriate and nutritious food.

Finally, I would push for increased state and federal support for food assistance programs. This includes lobbying for the reinstatement of funding for emergency food services, particularly in urban centers like San Francisco, which have high rates of food insecurity due to the cost of living.