

**Potrero Hill Democratic Club
District Attorney Candidate Appearance
Tuesday, August 30, 2022 on Zoom**

Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate name: John Hamasaki
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*Please write a brief response (up to 200 words) to each question. **Please email the completed questionnaire to contact_us@phdemclub.org by Sunday, August 28.** The questionnaires will be made available online to club members.*

1. Why are you running and why should we vote for you?

I am running for District Attorney because the mayor had a chance to appoint a responsible, ethical, serious prosecutor, and caused a crisis by going the opposite route. Voting for me will be electing an independent District Attorney that answers only to the people of San Francisco. I will enforce smart justice, holding everyone accountable regardless of wealth, status, race, identity, or other protected classes. I will continue to bring more seats to the table especially for those who intersect with marginalized communities.

As District Attorney, I'd have the greatest ability to address the issues currently harming San Franciscans:

- Protect the San Francisco community while ensuring that justice is served in every case – from car break-ins to wage theft to violent crimes.
- Restore integrity and trust to the District Attorney's Office through independent leadership, transparency, data analysis of criminal case outcomes.
- Protect vulnerable victims, including Asian elders and domestic violence victims, by building trust through seriously prosecuting hate crimes and sexual assaults, and investing in culturally competent victim services including language access and wrap around services.
- Address systemic racism in the criminal justice system through ending the death penalty, addressing mass incarceration, promoting diversion programs, and more.

2. What sets you apart from your opponents?

Unlike other candidates, I am running as the only independent candidate for District Attorney, who will only answer to the people of San Francisco. We are running a grassroots-funded, corporate-free campaign because it's vital for San Francisco's next District Attorney to be an independent prosecutor unafraid to take on crimes that corporations and corrupt politicians have been getting away with for years. I'm running to fight for safety and smart justice, and to hold everyone accountable under the law, regardless of wealth or status. As an independent District Attorney, I am also the most qualified candidate to keep San Franciscans safe.

Furthermore, as a lawyer with 14 years of experience in the courtroom and as a former Police Commissioner (2018-2022), I have pushed for and won criminal justice reforms that make all San Franciscans safer. As a victim of anti-Asian violence and member of the AABA (six years as board member and 2020 President), I have a firsthand and widespread understanding of the Asian community's fears. I have formed a diverse team of women, youth, and people of color to help form campaign strategy and platform.

3. What do you view as the top three issues facing the San Francisco District Attorney's office? Please describe your solutions for those issues.

1) Ending mass incarceration: With its disastrous effects, ending mass incarceration is a moral/fiscal imperative critical to public safety. I will promote diversion programs that address roots of offending behavior (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, poverty). By keeping low-level offenders out of confinement, we can connect them with the support they need to break incarceration cycles. Supplemental policies include ending the prosecution of minors as adults, ending cash bail, decriminalizing quality of life and low-level offenses, and curtailing sentence enhancements.

2) Reimagining victims services: Most crime victims are unsatisfied with their justice system experience, which expects punishing offenders to heal victims. To address this, I'll expand victims compensation funds, decrease wait times for funds access, offer restorative justice programming, hire more victims advocates, and listen to the majority who want investments in rehabilitation and treatment programs.

3) Build trust with marginalized communities: Lack of trust undermines public safety, resulting in the underreporting of crime and unwillingness to testify against offenders. If elected, I will take proactive action to reduce offending behavior by taking the prosecution of hate crimes and sexual assaults with the seriousness they require, and dedicating resources to building trust between our office and our communities.

4. What are some specific public safety strategies currently being implemented in San Francisco that you agree or disagree with? With these strategies in mind, what do you intend to do about public safety if elected District Attorney?

Public Safety is the wellbeing of all members of our community, the prevention of crime, and holding individuals accountable who harm others by way of a rehabilitative care-focused approach. I believe the prosecutor can play an instrumental role in reducing crime by connecting individuals with the services they need to live healthy law-abiding lives. In promoting and expanding diversion programs, drug treatment programs and mental health services, the prosecutor can help combat the underlying drivers of crime. Furthermore, by decriminalizing poverty and homelessness the prosecutor can divert individuals who come into contact with the justice system with resources and services. In instances where an individual poses an imminent threat to others or has greatly harmed others, the prosecutor can use their discretion to seek incarceration. Public safety is not achieved by way of short-sighted reactionary policies - we must embrace policies that will keep us safe in the months and years ahead.

We know that stable employment is key to reducing crime and recidivism. I would work with local businesses to create employment opportunities for high-risk individuals including formerly incarcerated people. Furthermore, I look forward to co-governing with community groups and serving as a partner in the development of incarceration alternatives. If elected, I will seek new ways to promote public safety without relying solely on incarceration.

5. What is your position on the death penalty? If you would seek it as District Attorney, how would you minimize the risk of sentencing an innocent person to death?

My opposition to the death penalty is a key tenet in my commitment to racial justice and dismantling systemic racism in our justice system. The administration of the death penalty is outdated, fraught with racial bias, endangers the most vulnerable members of our community, and subverts the integrity of our criminal justice system. As District Attorney, I would seek to end the death penalty.

6. What is your position on prosecuting minors as adults? What is your position on juvenile hall, and what sort of sentencing recommendations do you support for minors (whether

convicted of a misdemeanor or felony)?

Neurological development continues until age 25 and young brains differ from adult brains in ways that increase the likelihood of risky and reckless behavior. But the fact is that most young people who commit crime do not continue to do so into adulthood. When kids and young adults experience little contact with the criminal justice system, and when their cases remain in juvenile court, their long-term outcomes are substantially better. Locking up kids has never been shown to enhance public safety. Rather, it is correlated with higher rates of recidivism. Prosecuting children as adults further destabilizes juvenile offenders, increasing their likelihood of reoffending in the future.

As District Attorney, I will end the practice of prosecuting children as adults. I will work with law enforcement to prevent interrogation of kids absent the presence of counsel and their parents, advocate for diversion programs and specialized courts that address the needs of young adults, and seek alternatives to incarceration for teenagers where possible and appropriate.

7. What policies and practices can you implement to combat bias in decision-making within your Office, including in charging decisions, bail recommendations, diversion program placements, and plea bargains – as well as in internal Office practices?

I agree that bias (racial, identity based, and other demographic characteristics) is rampant throughout our justice system and must be addressed forcefully. Some specific policies I have in mind include:

- (1) Expanding our internal data collection efforts to track the race and identity of defendants and victims;
- (2) Making public data about the race and identity of defendants and victims, charges levied with demographic breakdowns, and case outcomes with demographic breakdowns;
- (3) Making public the demographic breakdown of DA staff;
- (4) Promoting hiring policies that diversify office staff to mirror the diverse communities the office serves;
- (5) Bringing in experts in identity based bias to regularly lead staff training sessions.

I am always open to learning about additional ways to address bias in our justice system.

8. What is your position on the California Court of Appeal's recent decision on charging three strikes offenses?

Policies like Three Strikes were implemented in absence of data suggesting they would enhance safety. In 1980, California's prison population was 23,000. In 1990 it was about 90,000. In 1999, five years after the passage of Three Strikes, California's prison population ballooned to 160,000 people. We have the data that shows that these regressive tough on crime policies don't make us safer. Three Strikes and the flood of enhancements we created, such as gang enhancements, severely exacerbated racial disparities. Fully 45% of people serving life sentences under the Three Strikes Law are Black, even though Black people make up just 6% of CA's total population. We all deserve smarter justice and safety, not a revolving door of our prisons. This makes us all unsafe and further creates more victims of crime.

9. How will your office investigate officer-involved shootings and other accusations of police misconduct?

Despite some progress, we still have not made nearly enough steps towards addressing the cases of law enforcement brutality. Sadly, the strides we have made have been or may soon be undone by the current administration. If elected, I will vigorously investigate and, when appropriate, prosecute all forms of police

brutality and/or other law enforcement misconduct. I will ensure that independent DA investigators and lawyers handle the cases to avoid conflicts of interest. I have personally overseen police discipline cases involving fatal shootings, I know both the path and the timeline can be shortened with a prosecutor who is willing to handle these cases. All charging decisions should take place within 60 days after a shooting. These cases should move forward in the most efficient and ethical timeline possible.

10. What does the ideal relationship between the District Attorney's office and the San Francisco Police Department look like, and how will you go about achieving that relationship?

It is important that the District Attorney maintains a working relationship with all criminal justice partners, while maintaining strict independence. I plan to work with SFPD, however, I will ultimately do what is right for the people of San Francisco and make sure that every person is held accountable under the law. That includes investigating the San Francisco Police Department, and bringing charges if necessary. I have 4 years of overseeing discipline cases on the Police Commission and despite regular harassment and threats from the police union, I have never wavered in my duties to hold the police accountable.

Thank you for taking the time to fill this out, and thanks for running!