

LPoV Candidate Questionnaire Nov 2022

General Questions

Candidate Name *

Joe Alioto Veronese

Candidate Website

www.JoeForDA.com

Why are you running for *this* office?

I am running for San Francisco District Attorney to make this a safer City to live, work and raise a family. I was born and raised in San Francisco and intend to raise my son here. The people of San Francisco expect their District Attorney to be qualified and competent to deliver a 21st-century criminal justice system that will keep them safe, serve victims and reform deficiencies that have disproportionately affected and oppressed people of color and low-income individuals. I am running for district attorney because I am qualified to deliver a justice system that is fair, equitable, and accountable to each of us.

If elected, do you commit to completing your entire term?

100%

What are your values, and how did you get them?

My values come from my family and my life experiences. I was born and raised in San Francisco with an ingrained commitment to the City. My father, Adolfo Veronese, was a restaurateur in San Francisco. He was a kind man, loved by many. He was diagnosed with stomach cancer in his mid 40's. Although my parents were separated, they were still very close. He battled for more than three years through major surgeries until he succumbed at 49. I was 17 years old.

My mother, Angela Alioto, ran for political office and became a national figure in the legal world, achieving landmark victories for people who couldn't afford legal representation. As a member of the Board of Supervisors, she took on the AIDS crisis early and secured essential funding for its victims before any state or federal funding was available.

She took on the giant tobacco industry with anti-smoking legislation that was the first in the nation. She taught me to fight for people, to lend my time to the service of others, and to fight for what's right despite the opponent's size. This is where I get my values.

What communities do you represent, and how do they hold you accountable?

The best thing about San Francisco is San Franciscans. We have been through so much together, AIDS, Loma Prieta, homelessness/housing crisis, and a pandemic that has affected every family and business. Yet City Hall seems hopelessly mired in corruption and waste. But San Franciscans know how to pull together because we know we have to. In 1906 we got back on our feet and helped the other guy get back up too. That's the San Francisco way, and that's what a San Franciscan is.

In my legal practice, I represent people of color and whistleblowers in civil rights cases against some of the largest corporations in the world. My father was an immigrant who moved from Italy to the United States in his early twenties. My great-grandfather migrated at 12 from Sicily in the late 1800s. I hold citizenship in the United States and Italy and am fluent in Spanish and Italian. But I will represent all the people of San Francisco and every decision I make as district attorney will be guided by what is best for the people of San Francisco.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

While I have only recently announced my candidacy, I am impressed by the amazing active support and honest ethics of the Pissed Off Voters and would be proud to have your endorsement. I will actively pursue endorsements, I do not have a Mayor who can do it for me. I am proud to receive the endorsement of labor leaders and others, the most important endorsement is the support of the voters on election day.

What are the top three issues you will work on, and how will you implement solutions in a timely manner?

Public Safety - San Francisco used to be a City where people felt safe. Anyone could walk on any San Francisco street — day or night —without being afraid for their safety. Reestablishing a peaceful City is my #1 goal. I believe we can accomplish this with the respectful cooperation of the Police Department and I will include input from social programs such as the Street Crisis Response Teams and Community Ambassadors on a regular basis.

Criminal Justice Reform - The criminal system has historically been used as a tool of oppression against people of color, poor people and immigrants. I will take immediate steps to engage experts who will address the reforms we need to reverse structural problems that are built into the criminal justice system. This will not be easy, because they are entrenched.

Mental Health and addiction. We need to consider the effects of mental illness and addiction on criminal justice policy. We need a full assessment of its impact on police contact with citizens. We need to hold other city agencies to task for their insufficient response to mental health and addiction.

What for-profit or non-profit boards do you serve on, including political organizations?

I founded the National First Responders Fund (www.nfrf.org) in 2017. We support and fund first responders with mental health disorders and Post Traumatic Stress Injuries. I have also served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Omega Boys Club, which supports at-risk San Francisco youth and ensures college admission and financial support. I have also served as a member of the Board of Directors of Bay Area Democrats, tasked with raising money for Democratic candidates in the US Senate and in the House of Representatives in national efforts to win back a majority in both houses. I currently serve on The California Senate's International Relations Board.

What local and state commissions or policy bodies do you serve on?

As Police Commissioner, I worked tirelessly to reform the Police Department. In my four years of service, I challenged the Police Officers Association (POA) for its protection of bad police officers, worked with the ACLU drafting transparency in police disciplinary matters (known to this day as the “Veronese Report”). I co-authored the Early Warning System for police discipline, was the deciding vote to elect Theresa Sparks as the first transgender President of any Police Commission nationwide, and supported hiring hundreds of new police officers to cleanse the department of bad police officers through attrition. I served two governors as a California Criminal Justice (CCCJ) Commissioner for over seven years. As the paying agent directing millions of dollars of federal funds toward criminal justice programs throughout the state, I studied the funding of dozens of criminal justice programs. I supported the redirection of funds away from criminal marijuana enforcement and redirected millions of dollars away from incarceration (California Department of Corrections- CDCR) toward rehabilitation and re-entry programs. While I have had other professional experiences throughout my career, I have expert knowledge and exposure to the current criminal justice in San Francisco and throughout the state. I am confident that I can lead San Francisco into meaningful reform that will eliminate elements that have historically oppressed communities of color. This reform must be done while fulfilling the promise of keeping San Francisco safe and holding people (inside and outside the criminal justice system) accountable.

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Please describe specific accomplishments in your activism. What did you get done, and what was your role?

I was hired by progressive DA Terence Hallinan, who assigned me to the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) where I worked on a Diversion Program that held people accountable for criminal activity, but also created opportunities for redemption and rehabilitation. I was also assigned to investigate SF Police Officers for criminal activity and custodial deaths.

Besides my activism already mentioned in the criminal justice system, I was an early supporter of the Sunshine Ordinance and Public Power. My first run for elective office was for the Board of SF Public Power (It was not adopted by the voters).

As a civil rights attorney for more than 21 years, I have taken my activism to the courtrooms of both state and federal courthouses around the country. My career has been devoted to serving employees who have been discriminated against and treated unfairly, and protecting whistleblowers within government and corporations.

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Please list specific ways you have shown up for immigrants at risk of deportation.

I represent immigrants as a discrimination attorney against employers who seek to take advantage of their legal status. It is a standard tactic to attempt to involve immigration officials and have my clients deported. It is a scare tactic that should be illegal.

Please list specific ways you have fought against racism and white supremacy.

I have been a civil rights trial attorney for more than 21 years. 90% of my clients have been people of color in race, gender, sexual orientation discrimination cases in State and Federal Courts in California and Texas.

Please give us some examples of situations you've encountered where gender and LGBTQ inequity was evident and what you did or would do to address it.

I have sued billion-dollar corporations to enforce the rights of my LGBT and female clients. In one matter, I obtained a \$1.7 million dollar verdict in a case where George Lucas and Lucas Film denied a woman employment because she was pregnant. That particular client was my wife, pregnant with my son. Lucas had three law firms with a \$6 million dollar budget to secure a victory that took three years of litigation. I represented Cleve Jones in his lawsuit to obtain the right to publicly display the AIDS quilt. I was also the deciding vote to elect Theresa Sparks as the first President of any Police Commission nationwide.

Amid a homelessness crisis, how can the City and County of San Francisco improve the effectiveness of our city's homelessness and supportive housing services?

The City uses an array of non-profits as part of the Homeless Institution. These non-profits should be held to success metrics, audited and accountable. Removing SFPD from most situations involving unhoused people has been an obvious plus, and I have the utmost confidence in the Street Crisis Response Teams. I was a big supporter of the EMS6 program at the Fire Department that was the predecessor of the Street Crisis Response team. I lobbied heavily to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors to remove the ability for police officers to place 5150 involuntary holds on people. These are powers that should be reserved for mental health and medical professional not the criminal justice system.

What is your favorite park, and why?

Mayor Joseph L. Alioto Piazza, also known as Civic Center Plaza, the park across the street from City hall, was named after my grandfather in honor of his service. It is my favorite park for this reason and because some of the city's biggest problems are on full display to the elected officials working there. It's been the scene of protests and first amendment activity, concerts, end-points for parades. It has been the location of historical moments such as the impromptu gathering after the murder of Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk and the women's response to stripping their Roe-v Wade rights. It is where San Francisco goes for community empowerment.

Why do you want the League of Pissed Off Voters' endorsement?

I have always appreciated your endorsements and consulted your guide when making voting decisions. I value your activism and attitude toward establishment politics.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

To de-politicize the role of the Chief of Police, I will initiate a ballot measure to assign the appointment authority of the Chief of Police away from the Mayor to the District Attorney. Due to San Francisco's common jurisdictional boundaries, we are the only city and county where this would work.

Wage theft and other corporate crimes are real and will be prosecuted when I am District Attorney. I have represented clients against some of the largest corporations in the country in cases involving wage theft related to protected classes (age, gender, race, sexual orientation) and in retaliation (whistleblower) cases.

Investigate political corruption. At the time of the recall of District Attorney Chesa Boudin, there were several active criminal investigations involving the Mayor's office. Since the Mayor's appointment of interim District Attorney Jenkins, it has been reported that the political corruption unit has been disbanded.

Acting-DA Brooke Jenkins boasts of her career defending healthcare corporations from government investigations. She boasts about helping publicly-traded companies hide from accounting fraud investigations so they can "investigate" themselves. She helped automakers avoid responsibility for product liability and personal injury damage claims. She helped shield foreign makers of car parts from claims by Americans injured by their products.

I have a proud record of representing workers against corporations that prey on them.

What experience do you have with the District Attorney's office and the Criminal Legal System in general?

Graduated 2 Police Academy Classes (President of the 185th San Francisco Police Academy Class- 2 California POST Certificates.

3 years as a San Francisco Police Officer (Res)

5 Years as a Senior Criminal Investigator (Hallinan Administration)

7 Years as California Criminal Justice Commissioner (Serving two Governors)

3 Years as San Francisco Fire Commissioner

5 Years as Executive Director of the National First Responders Fund

21 Years as a Civil Rights Attorney

What policies would you keep in place from your predecessor, and what would you change?

I appreciate the focus that the Boudin administration had on Criminal Justice Reform and the elevation of this cause to the national conversation. I do not agree with how he did it, however. Cash bail, no-knock warrants, exile warrants, how rape evidence is treated, civil assessments are some of the ways that the system needs be reformed through direct action and legislation without sacrificing public safety.

What are the greatest challenges facing SF with respect to crime?

The people of San Francisco deserve a criminal justice system that represents that values, and will keep them safe. Some of the greatest challenges include: police accountability, budgeting for the District Attorney, outdated facilities and processes, including our jail system, and addiction and mental health.

Do you support the closure of 850 Bryant, jails #3 and #4?

Yes, its a terrible building, all of it.

Do you support opening supervised consumption services in San Francisco? If so, what would you do to protect them from Federal interference?

Supervised consumption services are a function of a failed mental health and addiction policy of the Mayor and her department of health. San Franciscans need to hold their government accountable for their failure to address mental health and addiction in a humane way. State and federal law (on the desk of the governor as we speak) will dictate the legality of these centers. I would prefer that the department of health step up and provide these addiction services, so that these centers do not become necessary. I recognize that the existing failed policies of the health department have made this conversation necessary to save lives and would differ to medical and health officials on their necessity.

As DA, what would you do to repair the harm done by the war on drugs?

Great question but I would not limit it to the war on drugs. We need to have a broader study of how criminal justice policy over the years has oppressed people of color and we need to address those concerns through activism and legislation at all level of government. Understanding and reversing the generational harm is essential to effective criminal justice reform.

Do you support decriminalizing all drugs, why or why not, and if so, what steps would you take to accomplish that?

I do not. I do support the decriminalization of marijuana. The broader question of other drugs would require further analysis and study on the effects on all people, especially those of color that have historically been disproportionately affected by government drug policy.

How would you reduce the SF jail population, including reducing the extreme racial disparity in the jail now?

The responsibility of the District Attorney is to prosecute behavior, not a protected class (color, national origin or otherwise). Notwithstanding, it is essential to understand and take into account those factors that have oppressed people of color as a measure of reversing those disproportionate negative effects of the criminal justice police on those communities.

What role, if any, should the criminal justice system have in addressing homelessness in SF?

Homelessness is not a crime. My role as District Attorney will be to hold the Mayor's office, city funding of non-profits, and those city agencies accountable for the mental health and addiction crisis on the streets of San Francisco that have too often led to criminal activity and victimization.

If elected DA, will you abstain from filing charges against sex workers or their clients for consensual acts of prostitution among adults?

This will not be a priority of my office.

In detail, describe how you would investigate a fatal shooting by a police officer. Would you set a timeline to have investigations completed?

I was on the officer involved shooting investigative team as a criminal investigator and have first hand experience in how these investigations are handled. It will critical that the district attorney have the resources to conduct these investigations without having to rely on the police department. There is an inherent conflict of interest in the current system that must be eliminated. Having these non-conflicted resources will allow the district attorney to conduct timely investigations that will give the public confidence that they are being managed appropriately and timely and without any perceived or inherent bias.

How would you prioritize the investigation of wage theft?

I have sued corporations for wage theft for more than 20 years. I would work hard to get state and federal funds to build a meaningful Workers protection Unit to prosecute these crimes.

How would you investigate city corruption by elected and appointed officials?

I would make it a priority by reinstating the political corruption unit dis-banned by Interim DA Jenkins. I would work federal officials in ongoing investigations.

Under what circumstances is pretrial detention appropriate and do you support cash bail?

Cash bail is inherently discriminatory and needs to be reformed through legislation that I will vigorously pursue.

What metrics would you use to determine your success as DA in four years?

If people feel safe and feel protected by a fair criminal justice system and have no idea what the district attorney does, my job will be done. If the criminal justice system is not in the news as failing these metrics or the people of San Francisco, then I will have been successful.

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