

# LPoV Candidate Questionnaire Nov 2022

## General Questions

Candidate Name \*

John Hamasaki

Candidate Website

johnhamasaki.com

Why are you running for *this* office?

I am running for District Attorney because the mayor had a chance to appoint a responsible, ethical, serious prosecutor, and made a decision to go the exact opposite route; it's been a crisis in the city ever since.

As an independent district attorney that answers only to the people of San Francisco, I will enforce smart justice, holding everyone accountable equally regardless of wealth, status, race, gender identity, or other protected classes. I will continue to bring more seats to the table especially for those who intersect with many marginalized communities.

As District Attorney, I would have the greatest ability to affect the issues that are currently causing significant harm to 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, and data analysis of criminal case outcomes.
- Protect vulnerable victims, including Asian elders and domestic violence victims.
- Investing in culturally competent victim services including language access and wrap around services.
- Partner with local and federal agencies to investigate and prosecute corruption in City Hall

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

Yes

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

As a young person I came to San Francisco because I had been the victim of an anti-Asian hate crime, and I saw San Francisco as a beacon of safety and justice. And like all proud San Franciscans, I have been outraged at the city corruption and backroom deals that are making all San Franciscans less safe, making a mockery of justice. Today I am asking for your support in my campaign to become what San Francisco needs: an independent District Attorney.

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

As a member of the Asian American community, and as a victim of anti-Asian violence, I understand firsthand our community's fears. As President of the Asian American Bar Association, I confronted the rise in anti-Asian violence during the pandemic. As District Attorney, I will fight for the safety of seniors and other vulnerable victims. I am a fourth-generation Japanese American and have lived with my family in North Beach for nearly three decades. If elected, I would be San Francisco's first Asian/East Asian District Attorney.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

Latinx Democratic Club, Tom Ammiano, Dean Preston

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

Protecting the San Francisco community while ensuring that justice is served in every case; from car break-ins to wage theft to violent crimes. Restoring integrity and trust to the District Attorney's Office through independent leadership, transparency, and data analysis of criminal case outcomes. Protecting vulnerable victims, including Asian elders and domestic violence victims. Investing in culturally competent victim services including language access and wrap around services. Partnering with local and federal agencies to investigate and prosecute corruption in City Hall.

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

None currently. I am a former president of the Asian American Bar Association (2020), having served six years on the board, and a former president of the Barristers Club of Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF). I have also served on the board of Informed California's Open Vallejo Initiative.

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

None currently. Previously, I served on the San Francisco Police Commission for four years. I've also been a member of the California for Criminal Justice Legislative Committee for four years.

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

I have been an activist attorney for my whole career. I started off representing demonstrators and protestors with the National Lawyers Guild. Over the years, I've represented everyone from the "hacktivist" group Anonymous to rap artists being prosecuted using rap lyrics.

I am proud of my work with CACJ with the Leg. Committee, where I worked to promote criminal justice reform bills and opposes legislation focused on mass incarceration.

As the president of the Asian American Bar Association, I worked to combat the rise of anti-Asian hate and bias.

As a San Francisco Police Commissioner, I worked on dozens of policies. A few of the ones I'm most proud of were two domestic violence policies I led on, including a new manual and policy for investigation of domestic violence cases. I also worked on the first ever policy for interactions with LGBTQ, gender-diverse, and transgender individuals. I also worked on the first ever policy on interacting with deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

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

As a defense attorney, I have represented immigrants in the criminal justice system. I worked with the Asian Law Caucus pro bono to obtain a pardon for a man who came to the US at 3 years old from Macau.  
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Pardoned-by-Brown-blasted-by-Trump-Bay-Area-man-12810642.php>

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

As a police commissioner, I initiated the working group to address racial biases in enforcement of traffic laws, including against the Black Latinx community which is stopped and searched excessively.

I have formed a diverse team of women, youths, and people of color to help form campaign strategy and platform. As District Attorney I want to continue to bring more seats to the table especially for those who intersect with many marginalized communities.

I've fought white supremacy as both an individual and as part of my work with every organization. I know firsthand the impacts of white supremacy and recognize that we can never truly have an equitable society until it is ended.

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.

In 2018, I helped draft and implement the first SFPD policy on interacting with transgender, gender-variant, and nonbinary individuals. I plan to continue my support of this community in the District Attorney's Office.

As president of both the Asian American Bar Association & Barristers Club of the Bar Association, I worked to ensure that women were represented in our leadership and on ALL committees. I set a policy that all panels and events must have women speakers. I worked to elevate women to the bench and also within the legal profession.

On the police commission, I worked on the two separate domestic violence working groups to ensure that victims were able to seek restraining orders and by updating the policies, including a nearly 50 page manual for domestic violence investigations. As a lawyer, I've represented domestic & sexual violence victims in their quest to seek justice, through civil and criminal matters. I have also represented marginalized communities, including transgender and gender-diverse individuals throughout my career, fighting for equal treatment in a historically biased justice system. I worked to assist women and marginalized folks advance within the legal profession, including within law firms and bar organizations. I also helped a number of minority and women lawyers become judges.

I will not tolerate a workplace where sexism and/or sexual harassment are present. I have a strong track record of holding individuals accountable for sexism and sexual harassment, including excluding members of bar associations who had conducted themselves in this manner. I've also removed police officers for domestic and sexual misconduct, ensuring that they are not able to commit these offenses under the color of authority. If members of my office partake in this type of conduct, they will be held accountable and the rights of the targets of this conduct will understand that they will be supported during any investigation. I have zero problems removing anyone from the office for conduct of this nature because it creates an unsafe working space for all.

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?

To solve our housing crisis we need to build housing that keeps our communities in their homes. When we don't build real affordable housing or only market rate housing we only continue to create a larger housing crisis. Next, I have and will continue to support legislation that passes/extends rent and vacancy control, which I see as a critical step for addressing California's housing crisis after 28 years as a renter in San Francisco.

Furthermore, I was the police commission leader with the Coalition on Homelessness to create and implement the Compassionate Alternative Response Team, a community-based non-police response to complaints or calls about the unhoused. As District Attorney, I would continue to work to remove policing as the primary solution to the unhoused.

What is your favorite park, and why?

Washington Square Park, in North Beach. It has been a faithful source of relaxation and community for me in my 28 years as a San Franciscan. I made my first friends in SF and met my partner at their community events. I've spent hundreds of hours working, reading, and resting on their lawns. No matter where I live, Washington Square will always be a place I call home.

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

I would highly value the League of Pissed Off Voters' endorsement given their successful history of fighting for justice in San Francisco. I want to join and engage with the coalition of SF voters who, like me, are frustrated and tired of the criminal justice and political systems only working for the wealthy and well connected of SF. I'm running as an independent DA and gaining the endorsement from the LPOV would help us come together and fight for positive change in our city.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

I'm thankful for the opportunity to meet with your organization and request your endorsement. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to reach out.

District Attorney

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

I have been an experienced litigator for 14 years. I started my own law firm, Hamasaki Law. I served as a Police Commission for four years, and an active member of the Asian American Bar Association Board for six years, including sitting President in 2020.

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

There are a lot of policies I'd like to change from my predecessor. Top among them would be to bring back the restorative justice referrals program. We can have safety and justice. Tough on crime approaches to safety don't make us safer. When the District Attorney's office is focused on keeping citizens safe instead of making brazen political statements we're all safer.

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

One of the greatest challenges facing SF is the increasing politicization of criminal justice. This is the reason why I decided to run, because city corruption makes us all unsafe. There has been a focus on quick immediate outcomes instead of investing in addressing the root causes of crime. That polarizing politicization and fear mongering is what led to the failed "war on drugs" and "tough on crime" policies that has led to so many of our most vulnerable communities in a cycle of mass incarceration all while crime rates actually increase.

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

Yes, 850 Bryant was declared seismically unsafe in 1996. Inmates, visitors, and employees all are forced to conduct business in a building in disrepair with reported rat and roach infestations, asbestos exposure, and a score of sewage and plumbing-related issues. This has to change.

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

Yes, as District Attorney I would use my voice and platform to continue to advocate for their protection.

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

The war on drugs has never worked to make us safe. We have to address the opioid crisis at the root cause and with data based solutions. We must treat this as a public health issue and have a healthcare focused approach. This starts with more investment in diversion programs to give those struggling with addiction a path out.

I do not think that street level drug sales are acceptable, but I want to find ways to address it in a way that addresses both accountability and gives people a chance to move forward with their lives. As far as past-harm, we should restore rights to people impacted by the drug war, including allowing for records to be sealed.

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

Substance use is a public health issue. I believe in always putting the right experts in charge of the right issues. Policing and the war on drugs has failed to address issues with drug use, while contributing to our system of mass incarceration.

I struggle with decriminalization without a way to regulate drugs so that people are not unintentionally exposed to drugs that may harm or kill them.

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

I would work to increase pretrial release options, to ensure public safety while allowing individuals to live and work in their community. We also need to clear the trial backlog, through finding positive resolutions that address accountability while setting individuals up to succeed after they are released.

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

Policing as a strategy to address homelessness been proven time and time again as inhumane and ineffective. I was the police commission leader with the Coalition on Homelessness to create and implement the Compassionate Alternative Response Team, a community-based non-police response to complaints or calls about the unhoused. As District Attorney, I would continue to work to remove policing as the primary solution to the unhoused.

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

Yes, sex work is work.

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

Too often, prosecutors have used delay tactics to avoid charging police officers with crimes. Or convene grand juries and present a weak case, so that the grand jury doesn't return an indictment.

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 take on police violence.

I think any charging decision should take place within 60 days after a shooting, but would prefer shorter. Beyond that it is up to the judge to control the calendar, but I think these cases should move forward on the most efficient timeline possible.

How would you prioritize the investigation of wage theft?

The historical failure of prosecutors to tackle wage theft and other corporate crimes has led to the feeling that we have a two-tiered system of justice, with criminal courts being reserved for the poor and working class. The other problem is that wage theft and corporate crime often have the largest impact on regular working people who are already struggling to make do.

Focusing resources on these cases will not only help restore integrity to the justice system, but prevent employers and corporations from targeting the poor and working class. I plan to work with local nonprofits and the labor commissioner to ensure prosecution of those who steal wages from the poor and working class.

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

I'm running to an independent District Attorney who will hold everyone accountable to the law. Whether you are a multi-million corporation exploiting workers and small business owners or a political machine selling influence in City Hall, I will fight for safety and justice. I would work to expand the public integrity unit, partner with local and federal agencies to focus on corruption in City Hall. It is destroying our city.



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

I do not support cash bail. If someone is a danger to the public, it doesn't matter if they have enough money to buy their freedom. Justice should be held equally under the law regardless of wealth or status.

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

The greatest metric of success as District Attorney is judged by safety and justice. We can't continue to measure success by how many people we put in jail. Metrics of success should be measured by a decreased rate of recidivism and of course, lowered rate of reported crimes.

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