Candidate Name *
Rebecca Susan Feng Young

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Why are you running for this office?
It's time the PD's office was led by a strong, experienced, hard-working, visionary woman of color who will lift and inspire the attorneys and staff by supporting their work on the frontlines to provide the best defense money can't buy.
I am running for public defender to unify the office, restore the office focus to the core mission of vigorous and compassionate, client-centered representation, and to restore transparency and integrity to the Public Defender's Office.

If elected, do you commit to completing your entire term?
Yes, absolutely.
What are your values, and how did you get them?

I was raised by a father from Shanghai, China, who held traditional Chinese values of family first, hard work and sacrifice. My white mother, raised in a lower-middle class family living in Ohio, held traditional American values of family, church and education. Coming from vastly different cultural upbringings and languages, they intersected over their love for and need to provide for their children. To this mix, my Mother added a deep reverence for the American Constitution. What neither anticipated was that their mixed race children would face irrational prejudice and hostility from the white community to which we moved on Long Island. I was 11. Moving to Levittown, Long Island from Harlem in New York City shattered my innocence about the world and ultimately broke my parent's marriage. My mother simply could not help her children navigate the hostility and physical fear we were experiencing every day at school. She had not a clue. My mother, a star student, always did well in school - to her school was blissful, but to me it was hell on earth. I wanted to move back to New York City and so did my Father. From this chaotic and psychically disrupting experience of racial hatred emerged a warrior determined to fight for and protect whoever was being excluded or treated as second-class. My father passed on distinct values of 1. love yourself; 2. love others; 3. build a strong foundation for your future. My mother's teachings were always more externally focused: that we had a responsibility to do what was right for the community we lived in and to defend the American Constitution. Although their marriage did not survive America's oppressive economic structure and racial prejudice, all six of their children still believe in and fight for the promise of America.

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

I think it's hubristic to claim that I represent an entire community. What might be more accurate is to say that I have always been a voice for the voiceless, whoever they may be. I believe that people who recognize how the American social economy uses race to divide us against each other are my community. Using race to further class divisions or to create tensions between people who share common goals and values is a tool of white supremacy. The presence of two beautiful children in my life is the best accountability tool.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

This is almost like asking me to pick my favorite child. Geoffrey M Brown, Public Defender, San Francisco 1978 - 2001; Sangeeta Sinha, Former Deputy Public Defender, San Francisco; & Elizabeth Hilton, 27 year veteran, San Francisco Public Defender; Head Attorney, Complex Litigation Unit. I am most proud of securing the endorsements of Public Defenders, particularly ones who know my trial and management work.
What are the top three issues you will work on, and how will you implement solutions in a timely manner?

There are critical issues facing the Public Defender's Office both externally and internally. Externally, the trial court backlog is affecting both attorney-client relationships and relationships with the court; 2. 23 hour lockdown in the jail for the last two years is the equivalent of solitary confinement and is deemed torture; 3. Re-establishing community presence.

Internally, 1. Back-breaking caseloads are depleting morale; 2. Retention of experienced women, who have left in droves; 3. Restoring transparency to office policy regarding promotions and elevations.

I have a plan for each of these issues, but it is protected work-product. At this time, I do not think it is strategic to share my implementation plan because the leader of LPOV is working with the incumbent's campaign.

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

I do not currently serve on any boards. But I am a proud member of The Boudin 15, having been fired by Brooke Jenkins for prosecuting police.

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

I formerly served on BASF, Criminal Justice Task Force (CJTF), the San Francisco Public Defender Racial Justice Committee, Co-chair; Public Defenders for Racial Justice, co-chair; Body Worn Camera Working Group and Biased Policing Working Group.
Please describe specific accomplishments in your activism. What did you get done, and what was your role?

A good public defender knows that she is part of the underground railroad in its 21st century form. She is in the trenches of the continuing battle for civil rights. As a member of BASF's CJTF, I wrote the memorandum for the Police Commission that led to their adoption of a stop and frisk policy that was more restrictive than what the SFPD was advocating for; As a member of Pub Def RJC, I wrote a 10 Point Plan for Police Dept. Reform; wrote letters to the BOS regarding the racist text messaging and with Jeff Adachi prepared a press conference; organized the PDO march/contingent for the George Floyd protest including making all the signs that everyone carried in the march and held two press conferences with Demarris Evans regarding police shootings; as a member of PDRJ, I helped produced three Bay Area-wide trainings for public defenders using a racial justice lens, Throughout 2021, Jane Brown, Chair of PDRJ and I conducted statewide trainings on AB 2542, the Racial Justice Act. In this regard, I put together the PowerPoint, including, selecting the illustrative videos for it and wrote much of the content, along with Jane Brown.

I helped edit drafts of SB 1437, the Felony Murder Reform with a group called, Reform Justice; helped edit AB 333, the 2021 legislation that significantly narrowed use of the gang statute; and drafted some of the Legislative findings to accompany AB 333. On behalf of the Public Defender's Office, I produced the first, "Get to Know Your Public Defender" in the Bayview. I think I learned more than I taught. During the pandemic, I reinvigorated Clean Slate clinics so that the important work of clearing obstacles to employment and housing could continue.

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

The INS (ICE's former designation) tried to deport my Father for 12 years. Even though he had first 2, then 4, then 6 children, INS denied him a green card and continued with deportation proceedings because they refused to recognize his marriage to my Mother. So I showed up with him whenever he had to go to court.

My direct legal work fighting ICE was before I joined the SF Public Defender's office. When I was in private practice, ILRC recruited me for pro bono work representing clients funneled through CISPES - the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. I represented a man seeking asylum.

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

Please see answer above regarding activism. I always speak truth to power. That is what I am doing by running for Public Defender now.
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.

Early in my legal career, I confronted sexual harassment from male supervisors and judges. The most unimaginable things were said to me causing deep humiliation. I taped the Anita Hill hearings so that I could watch them when I got home from work. (She is my shero, and I recently saw her in conversation with Lara Bazelon at City Arts & Lectures.)

To this day, even in a presumably progressive office like the Public Defender's office, women with decades of experience working in the office who strive for excellence and to reach management level status are bullied and marginalized.

One of my first steps as Public Defender will be to create written policies regarding advancement and promotion that are based on experience, trial work, job performance and community involvement. With these values as guidelines, pretty much only the women will be able to be elevated to management. In my experience, women work twice as hard as men for half the recognition.

Second, I am committed to increasing diversity in the office with training to develop the next generation of leaders. Thus, I will implement training programs, using outside trainers, to center women of color for leadership opportunities.

Third, I will ask each employee to read and sign a pledge of self-awareness about implicit biases based on gender, race, age and national origin.

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?

Approximately 38% of San Francisco Public Defender clients are unhoused. Most of them are charged with misdemeanors. Housing insecurity must be addressed by our attorneys and social workers if we are to provide wrap-around services - a hallmark of client-centered representation. A good public defender must address the cycles of trauma, drug addiction, mental illness, and homelessness that bring so many of our clients into the criminal legal system.

San Francisco has the money to competently address our homeless crisis, but it lacks the political will. We are truly at a crisis point.

If elected, I would work with the Mayor’s office, HSS, and the Probation Department to implement a long-term solution that included housing in four separate hotels (1 – women; 1-men; 1 – coed for couples; 1- dual diagnosis), plus push for safe injection sites and two more navigation centers that included showers, food and health care.

Working with churches and community groups, I would organize a united front to keep pressure on these City agencies to make housing a priority. This long-vision project is doable and has citizenry support. Every San Franciscan I speak with has compassion for people struggling with mental health crises and housing insecurity. San Francisco has many bright lights who want to work together to address this tragedy. We must work together to funnel resources into the project with dedicated, honest civil servants doing the work.
What is your favorite park, and why?

Dolores Park. Because I can walk to it. When I go there I can hear mariachi music, Latin jazz, sometimes drumming, hear at least 5 different languages (during the summer) and see the City skyline.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

Being a public defender often means working with society’s most disenfranchised and traumatized members.
It is not just another J-O-B out of law school. At the risk of being cliched, public defender work is a calling. But even if you’re called, you may not be willing to give what it takes.

Wanting to help people or not liking inequality will not get you through the daily demands of public defender work. You have to be so pissed off at racism, poverty and how power corrodes ethics, and how white supremacy rots the mind that you will do whatever it takes to overcome those paradigms.
This means that winning also has to be pretty important to you. If winning or losing is all the same, you’re not going to fight hard.
Public defenders have to themselves be healed by the work of healing & helping others. That is how it will be possible to continue doing the work long after everyone else has given up.

Public Defender
What experience do you have with the Public Defender’s office and Criminal Defense in general?

Community Leadership
From 2014 to 2021, I co-chaired the Pub Def Racial Justice Committee (Office-wide group) and in 2015, I co-founded Public Defenders for Racial Justice (Bay Area-wide). In PDRJ, I produced three seminars to train public defenders to litigate using a racial justice lens. I have brought Clean Slate community days to the Bayview, and produced the first ever, “Meet Your Public Defender” Day. For the last six years I worked on two SFPD working groups (Body Worn Camera, and Bias, Pedestrian & Car Stops) to help change the Departmental General Orders.

Trial Experience
Trial work is where public defenders show their mettle. One cannot become a skilled and respected public defender without going to trial regularly.
I have tried over 60 cases in state, federal and juvenile court, including eight murder trials to verdict. Under Jeff Adachi’s training, my trial practice transformed. The example he set needs to continue if the San Francisco Public Defender Office is to maintain the greatness for which it was once known. My trial work includes a vigorous, pretrial litigation practice and I build a team around my clients so that they always feel supported and loved. I want my clients to know they have Gideon’s Army at their backs.

Management Experience
I have the management experience to make sure the attorneys and staff have the resources to competently represent every client.
For six years I co-managed 52 attorneys in the felony trial unit under Jeff Adachi’s leadership and implemented the office’s first system for tracking and balancing caseloads. I mentored dozens of young attorneys and interns, and wrote the first goals and objectives for the felony trial attorneys. I have worked in nearly every area of the office. See below:

- 19 years as a Public Defender
- 6 Years – Felony Trial Manager, 52 Attorneys
- 3 Years – Homicide Unit
- 6 Years – Felony Trial Rotation
- 3 Years – Research & Writing Unit
- 1 Year – Manager of Collaborative and Specialty Courts
- + 16 years Private Defense Practice
- + Over 60 trials in State, Federal and Juvenile Court, including (8) murder cases to verdict
- + Founding member, Women Defenders
- + Committee Work as a Public Defender:
  - Co-chair, Racial Justice Committee, San Francisco Public Defender
  - Co-chair, Public Defenders for Racial Justice
  - Member, BASF Criminal Justice Task Force
  - Member, Mayor Ed Lee’s Body Worn Camera Working Group
  - Member, SFPD Biased Policing Working Group
  - Editor, SB 1437, Legislation to Reform Felony Murder Rule
  - Statewide trainer, SB 2542, Racial Justice Act
  - Trained and mentored by Jeff Adachi
  - Clinical Professor, Criminal Defender Clinic, New College School of Law
What policies would you keep in place from your predecessor, and what would you change?

Please see answer above to top 3 priorities in the office and I addressed external and internal priorities. It is my intention to unify the office and restore the excellent advocacy and camaraderie that the late acclaimed Public Defender, Jeff Adachi established. During Jeff’s tenure I worked as his Felony Manager, while he organized the San Francisco Public Defender’s Office into what became the nationwide model for how indigent criminal defense services should function – focused on client-centered representation with equal opportunity for growth and advancement.
I would restore accountability and transparency. I would change the top-heavy management structure. I would keep felony unit staffing to a minimum of 36 attorneys who are picking up new felony cases.

If elected, what would your budget priorities for the Public Defender’s office be, and what is your vision for fully funding those?

Staffing is a top priority. Retaining experienced dedicated workers. Increasing the support staff, particularly social workers, paralegals. Making sure women had pay equity.

What metrics would you use to determine your success as Public Defender?

Level of Community outreach, # of trials, staff morale, staff retention, policy accomplishments.

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