



SFDCCC Candidate Questionnaire
Superior Court Judge - March 2020

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Are you a registered member of the Democratic Party? Yes No

Have you read the California Democratic Party Platform? Yes No

Will you fight for its implementation in policies? Yes No

[Under Canon 5B\(1\)\(a\) of the California Code of Judicial Ethics, a candidate for judicial office is prohibited from "mak\[ing\] statements to the electorate" that commit the](#)

candidate to positions on “cases, controversies, or issues that are likely to come before the courts.”

What office and which seat are you running for? [San Francisco Superior Court Judge, Seat 1](#)

What other elected positions have you held previously? [None](#)

PART I: GENERAL QUESTIONS (200 words or less)

1) Are you a registered member of the Democratic Party?

[Yes](#)

2) Please describe your contributions to the Democratic Party and/or increasing civic engagement in the democratic process at the local, state and or/national level in recent years.

[I've been a Democrat since I was 4 years old. My parents were immigrants from Jalisco, Mexico and the Democratic Party is the political party that has shown affection, compassion and empathy to their struggle. Searching for a voice for my family's difficulties, I started running for office in the first grade and didn't stop until](#)

I became student body president in high school. I have always advocated for the advancement of women and minorities in education and in fields where we are underrepresented. In high school I started volunteering at the local level on the Barbara Boxer Campaign because she was a woman and a Democrat. I learned how campaigns are run and how ideas are discussed and exchanged. When I attended San Francisco State University, I majored in political science and worked on several ballot measures. I also volunteered to do exit polls on the measures that I had worked on. I learned how to read voting data and realized that members of my community did not have a significant voice in the polls. While interning at the District Attorney's Office, I also studied and researched laws and legislation that affected members of my community such as three strikes, elder abuse and domestic violence. In my last semester of college, I applied for and received a full scholarship to become an Assembly Fellow in Sacramento. I was a fellow for Assembly Member Tony Cardenas from Van Nuys, CA. Because I really wanted to work with a Latino role model and San Francisco did not have any Latino representatives, I was directed to Tony's office. While I was there I wrote speeches, drafted legislation, and met with lobbyists. I met many other Latino representatives such as Cruz Bustamante and Antonio Villaraigosa. However, I always harbored the wish that someday there would be more Latina women in the State Legislature. After graduating from College I wanted to understand how government and democracy worked at the Federal Level so I went to Washington DC. While I was there, I worked at the law firm of Lasa Monroig and Veve as a Legislative assistant working with the Government of Puerto Rico. I also worked at Baker, Donelson, Bearman and Caldwell in Washington D.C. while I was in law school. There I learned how clients advocate for their interests on the national level. After graduation, I spent a lot of time thinking about how I could best help my community back home in San Francisco. Growing up I saw a lot of homelessness, mental illness and drug addiction. I decided to move home and I've now been an advocate for women, families, and the mentally ill for the last 17 years as a deputy public defender. Every one of my over 50 jury trials has been an exercise in democracy and an application of our nation's constitutional rights. I've dedicated my life to providing equal justice for San Franciscans who can not afford an attorney. Now I am running for judge to ensure that our courts are in touch with the communities they serve and provide equal treatment for all.

3) Are there any other civic causes or organizations that you are involved with currently? Please describe.

1. I am a board member of San Francisco La Raza Lawyer's Association. I sit on the Scholarship Committee where we help students fund their summer internships at public interest clerkships. I have also spoken at various diversity and women's issues panels.
2. I was on the Board of La Raza Centro Legal last year, which helps immigrants, elderly and tenants with legal assistance.
3. I participate in Vanderbilt Law School's Interview Program for incoming students. I support and encourage women and minorities to apply to this prestigious institution. I make recommendations to Vanderbilt Law School as to which applicants they should accept. I have advocated for more diversity at Vanderbilt Law School. I was one of the first Mexican American Women to graduate from VLS and I would still like to see more do so.
4. I have guest taught at Hastings College of the Law through the Trial Advocacy Program.
5. I have been a guest judge at Golden Gate Law School's In Vino Veritas Moot court competition.
6. Mentor and recruit law students to practice law.
7. Participated as a guest panelist for the Mayors Youth Advocacy Day.
8. Decorated City Hall for the Mayors Hispanic Heritage Celebration Day.
9. I have co-chaired the SF Public Defender's Toy Drive, done in conjunction with the San Francisco Bar Association, for approximately 10 years. We provide approximately 100 toys or clothing items annually to children of all backgrounds in need.
10. San Francisco Public Defenders Office Pride committee.
11. Make sandwiches with my twin girls for St. Vincent de Paul's weekly food drive.
12. Chair of the hospitality committee at St. Brendan's church.

4) Please list any organizations or elected officials who have endorsed you.

Individuals

- Fiona Ma, California State Treasurer
- Malia Cohen, State Board of Equalization
- Dolores Huerta, Labor and Civil Rights Leader
- Mark Leno, State Senator (former)
- Tom Ammann, State Assemblyman (former) & LBGTQ Rights Leader
- Sandra Lee Fewer, District 1 Supervisor
- Aaron Peskin, District 3 Supervisor
- Dean Preston, District 5 Supervisor-elect
- Matt Haney, District 6 Supervisor

- Norman Yee, District 7 Supervisor
- Rafael Mandelman, District 8 Supervisor
- Hillary Ronen, District 9 Supervisor
- Shamann Walton, District 10 Supervisor
- Jane Kim, District 6 Supervisor (former)
- Mano Raju, SF Public Defender
- Tom Temprano, Vice President, Board of City College
- Brigitte Davila, Board of City College
- Thea Selby, Board of City College
- Bevan Dufty, President, BART Board of Directors
- Janice Li, BART board of directors

Organizations

- SF Laraza Lawyers Organization
- SF Latino Democrats
- UFCW 648
- SF Tenants Union
- SF Berniecrats
- SF Young Democrats

PART II: SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS (250 Words or less)

- 1) What do you perceive as the strengths of the Superior Court? What are the current weaknesses and how would you like to see the judicial system improved?

I believe Restorative and Collaborative Courts are one book end of strengths of the Superior Court and the other is the jury trial system anchored in the presumption of innocence. An area where the Superior Court could improve is in making sure that they are in touch with the communities that they serve. I seek to broaden the perspective through which San Francisco's judiciary approaches the individuals who come before it by applying my professional and life experience as a 17 year public defender, a woman of color, and as a San Francisco native. I would also be the first Mexican-American woman elected to the San Francisco Superior Court without first being appointed.

- 2) Please summarize your qualifications and experience for the office you are seeking. Have you ever had any experience with management?

The San Francisco Bar Association has ranked me well qualified to serve on the San Francisco Superior Court. However, what distinguishes my candidacy is my ties and dedication to the community which I aim to serve.

I am a San Francisco native whose parents immigrated from Jalisco, Mexico in search of a better life. They began their American journey as migrant farmworkers in Southern California. To avoid deportation, my parents moved to San Francisco and my dad joined Labor Union 261 as a construction worker. My mother supplemented the family income by recycling cans and cardboard. They did not speak English and never went to school. We all lived in a studio apartment two blocks away from the Hall of Justice on 9th and Bryant. The LGBTQ community inspired my political activism and I wanted to become the voice for equality and representation.

I attended Bessie Carmichael and St. Joseph's school which primarily consisted of Filipino Americans. They were my community and life for 9 years. I emulated the example of hard work set by my parents and role models in my community and was awarded financial assistance to attend St. Paul's High School for girls in Noe Valley, where I graduated as Valedictorian and Student Body President. During college I was a public policy intern at the San Francisco District Attorneys Office for almost 3 years and worked on domestic violence, elder abuse and Three Strikes issues. I went on to graduate Summa Cum Laude from San Francisco State University and was one of the first Mexican-American women to receive a law degree from Vanderbilt Law School. For the last 17 years I have been an attorney at the Office of the San Francisco Public Defender's Office, dedicating my life to providing equal access to those who cannot afford an attorney. I have tried over 50 jury trials and litigated thousands of cases in my career. I have worked with San Francisco's Restorative and Collaborative Courts including the Behavioral Health Court, Veterans' Court, Drug Court, Clean Slate, Parole Court and Criminal Justice Court, to address the root cause of crime. If elected, I will ensure that our courts are in touch with the communities they serve and provide equal treatment for all. With your support I can become the first non-appointed Mexican American woman elected to the Superior Court Bench of San Francisco.

3) Have you ever had to support a legal position that was contrary to your personal moral beliefs? Please describe.

As an officer of the court, I am obligated to uphold California's laws and constitution. As a public defender, I have defended many individuals who were charged with

serious crimes. I represent people, not crimes. My moral obligation and the oath that I took requires that I presume every client is innocent and to fight for a just process. As a judge I will no longer advocate for a single individual's constitutional protections but the sanctity of the constitution as it applies to all people.

4) What do you perceive are the primary causes of the high rates of incarceration among communities of color? Do you believe the Court has a role to play in criminal justice reform?

My college criminal justice professor theorized that high rates of incarceration among communities of color are the result of a historic Class Justice model that our country is based on. When protection of property is the bedrock of many of our criminal laws, the poor are the focus of law enforcement's attention. The courts are in the best position to monitor these trends and apply innovative solutions to stop recidivism.

5) What is your perspective on the current bail schedule? How did you arrive at that understanding? How can the system be reformed?

Throughout my career as a public defender, many of my clients have had to assist in the preparation of their defenses while in jail because they were unable to make bail because they and/or their families simply could not afford to do so. Statistically, a person has a much better chance of mounting a successful defense if that person is not incarcerated while the case is pending. The CA Court of Appeals recently found in the Humphries case that the San Francisco Bail Schedule as set was unconstitutional. The system can be reformed by allowing public safety centered alternatives to meet the constitutional requirement proscribing excessive bail.

6) San Francisco is facing a car break-in epidemic that is perceived to be organized by crime networks. What do you believe are the factors leading to this problem? What is the court's role in preventing offenders returning to crime?

Much of the city's street level crime is the result of poverty, addiction, abuse, and/or mental illness. The court has its own point of opportunity in ending the cycle of recidivism through San Francisco's Restorative and Collaborative Courts including Young Adult Court, Behavioral Health Court, Veteran's Court, Drug Court, and Criminal Justice Court.

However many would argue that most people who are involved in sophisticated crime networks aren't the ones being caught and brought before a judge.

7) How does your background and experience prepare you for legal cases pertaining to the rights of women, people of color, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ?

My parents came to this country from Mexico as farmworkers. They did not have a formal education and did not speak English. To avoid deportation they came to San

Francisco and moved to 9th and Bryant which at the time was almost exclusively a leather community and LGBTQ. My first introduction to American culture was gay culture. I also went to school only a block away from the ARC. My entire community consisted of women, people of color, people with disabilities and LGBTQ. I also saw how, even in San Francisco, members of my community were discriminated against. Being sensitive to the differences of others because I myself am an “other” is the first step in providing equality to all those that appear before you.

8) Do you believe there should be implicit bias training for judges? Why or why not?

Yes. I also believe that the training needs to be done by judges with personal experiences in implicit bias such as women and members of other minority groups.

9) Does the court have a role in determining the outcomes of those with mental illness or the homeless who are caught up in our criminal justice system? If so, what is that role?

The court can play a role in decriminalizing the mentally ill and the homeless through diversionary programs that place such individuals in treatment facilities and residential programs instead of sending them to jails or prisons. They also have an opportunity to demand that programs deliver the resources that they are contracted to provide.

10) Should the court ensure a fair hearing in the case of pro per or unrepresented litigants in family court or housing court? If yes, how can the court improve the process to ensure fairness in these types of proceedings?

Judges inform unrepresented litigants of their right to seek counsel. I have seen judges stress the perils and even advise against litigating without counsel. The court resources center provides a list of resources including the State Bar where people can seek counsel. In the case where a litigant is unrepresented, a judge has the obligation to guide the litigant through the legal process patiently and give them sufficient time to respond to the court’s inquiry without advocating for one side or another. Humanity, dignity and patience are characteristics of an effective judge.

11) What do you perceive are the biggest obstacles the court faces in civil litigation? How can this be improved to best serve the general public?

The huge backlog of cases is the biggest obstacle the court faces in civil litigation. I believe this can be improved through more widespread use of community courts and increased number of courtrooms.