

## Candidate Hunger Action Challenge

# Roberto Hernandez



Running for:  
**San Francisco Board of Supervisors, District 9**

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## What do you think are the root causes of hunger, and what do you see as the government's role in addressing them?

The root causes of hunger in San Francisco is poverty. Poverty forces families to make hard choices and many times the type of food purchased may not be the healthiest. Inequality for our residents is also a root cause. The access to healthy food options must be addressed. When we do not have healthy food choices or grocery stores this also creates a hard ship for food access. Many of our food distributions happen during the day and during the pandemic I launched the Mission Food Hub and many families stood in the line with their children. My team quickly had to address children in the line who should have been in distance learning. We had to create an alternative time for families with children. For some people who lost income during the pandemic they still had hours allocated and many times were not able to access the food distribution. Another root cause is the lack of education on nutrition intake. We must get information out to our residents that is language appropriate. Such program such as WIC help families with small children but we need to expand these types of services. The health disparities that we face as SF is directly related to food intake. We can prevent diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol by helping to offer free fitness classes, more healthy food distribution and access to free food.

Governments role is to fund these programs during all hours and in particular non traditional hours. We need to look at the model programs and offer expansions for families. During the pandemic we saw that senior meals were stopped until the Great Plates program emerged. We saw temporary expansions of food stamps and food distribution at school sites. These programs need to continue and we need to be sure that seniors also have access to food. Seniors and disabled are not able to carry food or at times prepare it. As government we need to figure out a way to address all those who are hungry. If elected I am committed to exploring more food distribution and programming. I want to fund health educators that can help residents prepare healthy cheap meals rather than spend money on fast food. When we talk about poverty we must also talk about those who just do not know about the impact of food. For so many parents that work long hours they many times resort to fast food and what is cheaper such as frozen food options and soda. The soda tax has done a lot to help educate our communities on how food choice impacts health and yet we still are not able to reach all communities most impacted by food inequity. As the founder of the Mission Food Hub I know how hard it is to be able to receive funding to meet the demand. I also understand the culture relevance of the food we distribute and I am committed at making sure this is addressed in the city's food programs. As someone growing up in poverty I understand that decisions need to be made and at times my family did not have access to a full nutritious meal and how ideal would it be to be able to access a dinner pick up when ends do not meet. The amount allocated for the food distribution amounts do not allow for adequate services or distribution. We need to raise the amount per person and per family. I would also look at the summer food program and school lunch and strategize on how to bring more scratch kitchens to SF's communities that most need help addressing food inequity.

## If elected, how would you ensure coordination between the multiple government departments that fund and administer food assistance programs?

Even by coordinating with all the departments that fund and administer, we would still be unable to meet the gap. We are in a crisis where many of our residents are going hungry. Too often, we want to coordinate to ensure people receive food boxes only once. In policing food, we fail to work toward ensuring that those not connected to a food distribution get connected. We can look at scratch kitchens instead of purchasing frozen food options for our children. This is an inequity when one student can have gourmet food and snacks, and the child next to them has food that is still frozen. We need to look at how building more scratch kitchens can help offer better food and also how we can fund them to sell low-cost healthy meals. If elected I would work with the advocates who already have many of the solutions based on their experience.

**Studies have shown food can be medicine. If elected, how do you plan to use your position to improve food-related health disparities?**

With my work at the Mission Food Hub, I am already addressing health disparities and access to medical homes. I have worked closely with UCSF to create Unidos in Salud (united in care). This partnership offers monthly pop-ups for diabetes, cholesterol, high blood pressure, and HIV testing. These health issues can be prevented by providing more access to healthy foods, nutrition information, and funding for fitness activities and promotion. I would sponsor bike out days encouraging fitness activity goals and work towards a campaign that influences healthy life changes.

**The San Francisco-Marin Food Bank will be closing all Food Bank-run Pop-up Pantries by June 2025 due to cuts in government pandemic funding. This program currently serves 11,400 households, 75% of which are estimated to lose access to free weekly groceries when the funding ends. If elected, what would you do to ensure that all San Franciscans have access to nutritious foods?**

I am committed to advocating for food programs. As the founder of the Mission Food Hub, I am already an advocate for food and have continued to push for food equity. As a member of the Justice 40 I am working on farming and bringing more farming opportunities to SF. I am committed to addressing hunger. I understand that we have a lot of issues to deal with as elected officials. Still, food equity is personal to me, and even if I am not elected, I am committed to continuing to advocate for food distribution to the communities that depend on it. I saw the impact of the food pop-ups during the pandemic. It was sometimes the only food people had. We can not be one of the wealthiest cities in California and not address the need for food bank pop-up pantries.