

Candidate Hunger Action Challenge

Stephen Torres



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 are many, connected, and within our power to change. Many are systemic barriers that continue to exist because we continue to allow them to. We have become dependent on food resource models that are increasingly only accessible to those with the highest incomes such as high-end markets and direct delivery services. Both are reliant on large-scale corporate agriculture and distribution hubs which will become unsustainable as climate change advances as well as directly contributing to climate change themselves. Meanwhile, our most vulnerable communities continue to see supermarkets and local markets shutter as business models change and pantries and benefits like EBT defunded. Negative health impacts continue to skyrocket as these communities rapidly decline.

It is governments role to ensure these gaps are closed and that fresh food is readily accessible to our most vulnerable through important programs like the food bank, EBT and others and to become less reliant on corporate food source models as we stare down the a future of climate change. As a past recipient of these programs, I can speak directly to their importance and government's lack of urgency as many go needlessly hungry.

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

If elected, I will use my seat as a place of advocacy and legislative action to ensure these programs remain fully funded and supplemented should any one funding component fall short. Moreover though is the need to circumvent those shortfalls. I will push to ensure that an open dialogue exists between municipal, state, and federal agencies as well as ensuring that the organizations that help distribute on the ground are heard. Most importantly, we as a City must be accountable to how we are failing recipients of these efforts. As a past EBT recipient, I have had to deal with the frustration and hunger of delayed or discontinued benefits because my file was not updated or some other departmental snafu. We must audit these departments as well as initiate collection of the most recent data that reflects where our community need is being felt the most and in context.

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

If elected, prevention of food scarcity will be one of my chief priorities and firmly believe in the healing and preventative benefits of fresh food. I will advocate for the reform and highest function of our city departments that administer food benefits, advocate for the full funding and expansion of food pantries and banks. I will look for ways to expand local urban gardens and farms to become less dependent on corporate farming and mass distribution centers that gouge residents. I will push for a brick-and-mortar public system and expand neighborhood farmers markets for both day and night to meet the needs of our hardest working residents. I will advocate for programs that teach our most vulnerable, especially our young and elders, how to prepare and source sustainable food.

The San Francisco-Marín 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?

That this is happening is painful to acknowledge. As supervisor, I will hold our executive administration accountable to ensuring that these programs remain fully funded despite whatever austerities may be deemed necessary as food is essential to life and directly impacts many of the challenges we are facing from health, to local economy, to criminal justice issues.

The hard truth is that many of these cuts can be avoided if we reign in the outsized contracting of city jobs, hold major industries accountable to paying their fair share into our desperately needed programs, and ensuring that basic communication, coordination and every available funding resource are secured with our partners in both the state and federal government.