



A California Non-Profit Political Action Committee

**PDA-CA CANDIDATE  
QUESTIONNAIRE for the SAN FRANCISCO  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY RACE**

**NAME OF CANDIDATE** **Leif Dautch**  
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PDA-CA is non-profit political action committee newly formed by grassroots progressives in California. The primary objective of PDA-CA is to identify highly progressive Democratic Candidates within the state for statewide offices including, but not limited to, Governor, for State Assembly and Senate Offices, and for offices at the county and municipal levels. Candidates may be invited to apply for the Endorsement of PDA-CA. If that occurs, the candidate may enjoy grassroots help from the activists within PDA-CA to include walking precincts, phone banking and other activities, to assist that candidate to win election to the office sought.

We ask that the candidate observe the format of this questionnaire, and have it back to the requestor in PDF by the time designated in the cover letter. in order to be eligible for endorsement.

**NOTICE: YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE WILL BE PUBLISHED ON THE PDA-CA WEBSITE AND WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC VIEWING AND USE.**

## **1. Why are you running for District Attorney?**

I'm running for District Attorney because Trump's election in 2016 showed me that the costs of sitting on the sidelines are just too high. I realized that if we don't fully engage with the political process, if we don't throw everything we've got - including ourselves - into the arena, then we don't have the right to sit at home and complain.

So I decided to do something about our broken criminal justice system. We lock up too many people, yet don't keep our communities safe. We spend hundreds of millions of dollars, yet have some of the highest recidivism rates in the country. We talk about reform, yet perpetuate racial inequities in the justice system. All the while, a humanitarian and public health crisis plays out on our streets with the homeless population.

I'm running for District Attorney because I know there is a better way. A model grounded in compassion and progressive values, but one that keeps our streets safe. A model that ensures victims of crime get the justice they deserve, while defendants get the help they need to address the root causes of crime. A model that will make us proud to live in an equitable and safe San Francisco.

## **2. What makes you the best candidate for this position?**

I am the only candidate in the DA's race who is both a prosecutor and who manages a team of prosecutors—a critical combination for the management position of District Attorney. I will also bring a lifelong passion for criminal justice to the role, a passion which traces to my mom's work as a nurse at our local juvenile hall along the central coast of California. After years caring for the youth staying there, my mom convinced us that we had to become a foster family. We ended up taking in a dozen kids over the course of a decade, adopting two. Through those kids, I saw firsthand the effects of trauma and of poverty, the cycles of crime, how the deck can be stacked against you from day one. But I also saw amazing people like my mom working within the justice system to intervene early, to make sure victims got the justice they deserved while defendants got the help they needed to make sure they never reoffended.

It was that childhood exposure to the justice system that set me on this path. A path that took me from an organic farm in rural California to Yale, to Harvard Law School, to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, to President Obama's campaign, to the Presidency of the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Commission, and for the past 7 years, as a Deputy Attorney General for the State of California. Those varied experiences, and the inspiration I draw from saints working inside the system—people like my mom—make me the right person for the job.

## **3. What are the most important issues in criminal justice and how do you intend to solve them?**

Three issues that are driving my campaign are homelessness, police accountability, and environmental justice.

We have a humanitarian and public health crisis playing out on our streets, and I see it every day working in the Tenderloin. There is no single solution to this crisis, but there are two specific things I would do as District Attorney to address this crisis. First, I would prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place by prosecuting landlords who fraudulently evict tenants. Second in a Chronicle op-ed last week I proposed to convert our nearly-empty Juvenile Hall into a Mental Health Justice Center for youth and adults battling mental illness.

Second, when I launched my campaign for District Attorney, I spoke with members of the Justice for Mario Woods Coalition. One recurring theme in their comments was the belief that the current DA was applying a different standard to the investigation and charging of police officers than he would apply to anyone else accused of a crime. Investigations dragged on for years, with an elaborate presentation to justify not charging an officer. In fact, not a single charge has been filed against a single officer for any of the fatal shootings that occurred during the incumbent's tenure.

I will bring three things to the DA role that will be measurable improvements on the status quo. First, I will not have the inherent conflict of interest of making charging decisions involving police officers that I used to supervise as Police Chief. Second, rather than taking years to investigate these cases, I vow to complete my investigation of any officer-involved shooting within 6 months and hold a town hall explaining my decision to charge, or not charge, the officer. Third, I will follow the lead of some jurisdictions around the country by exploring whether charges other than homicide may be brought that would circumvent limitations in current law that prevent victims of crime from getting the justice they deserve.

Finally, as someone who grew up on an organic farm in rural California, the environment is incredibly important to me. So I was disturbed to find out that the incumbent DA disbanded an Environmental Justice Unit that Kamala Harris launched back in 2005 (while I was interning for her). So if there is an oil spill in the Bay, or a company falsifies soil records - like is playing out right now at the Hunters Point Shipyard - the DA's Office does not have a team to investigate and prosecute those polluters. If elected, I would restore the Environmental Justice Unit and make sure that San Francisco is a leader in that area, not a follower.

#### **4. Please describe your courtroom experience?**

For the past 6.5 years, I have served as a Deputy Attorney General at the California Attorney General's Office. Working in the Criminal Division, I have handled more than 400 cases in state and federal court - from trials to arguments before the California Supreme Court. In 2017, I argued a trio of cases before the California Supreme Court and won. I have argued more than 40 cases in the California Courts of Appeal in San Francisco and San Jose, and have argued eight cases before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, winning each federal case. I have also argued six dispositive motions in the federal district court here in San Francisco, and conducted three trials involving driving under the influence, prison abuse, and eviction defense. I have handled preliminary and probation revocation hearings involving domestic violence, assault, and drug charges. During a student externship at the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, I second-chaired approximately 20 preliminary hearings and participated in plea bargaining negotiations in roughly 25 cases. Finally, as an assistant supervisor at the Attorney General's Office, I have edited more than 100 briefs and supervised attorneys in court.