

## CITY OF OAKLAND PUBLIC ETHICS COMMISSION

### Commissioner Application



Name: Michael MacDonald

Mailing Address: [Redacted]  
Daytime Phone: [Redacted]

Email: [Redacted] City Council District: 3

Are you an Oakland resident?  Yes  No Years of Residency in Oakland: 2 years

List any City of Oakland Boards or Commissions (including this Commission) on which you currently or have previously served:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please answer yes or no to all the following questions:**

1. Are you currently employed by the City or have any direct and substantial financial interest in any work, business, or official action by the City?  Yes  No
2. Are you currently or planning to seek election to any other public office, participate in, or contribute to an Oakland municipal campaign?  Yes  No
3. Are you currently or planning to endorse, support, oppose, or work on behalf of any candidate or measure in an Oakland election?  Yes  No
4. Are you an Oakland lobbyist or required to register as a lobbyist, or do you receive gifts or compensation from an Oakland lobbyist?  Yes  No
5. Have you attended a Public Ethics Commission meeting?  Yes  No If yes, when? May 6, 2019
6. List any languages other than English that you speak fluently. \_\_\_\_\_
7. How did you hear about this vacancy? Commission Webpage

**List the names, addresses and telephone numbers of two references:**

1. Name: Thai Nam Pham  
Address: [Redacted]  
Phone: [Redacted]

2. Name: Frances Johnson  
Address: [Redacted]  
Phone: [Redacted]

*By signing below, I certify that all of the information included in this application and supporting materials is true to the best of my knowledge. I also understand that this application packet is a public record, subject to public inspection, and that if I proceed to the final interview with the Commission, the packet will be distributed publicly as part of the selection process.*

Signature: Michael MacDonald

Date: 10/29/2019

*See Supplemental Questions on next page →*

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## MICHAEL B. MACDONALD

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### 1. Why do you want to serve on the Public Ethics commission?

I learned from a very young age, while joining my grandmother to work as a poll worker for every election, that participation in political systems is the foundation of a democratic society. But I also learned quickly, the reason my grandmother participated, was because she trusted the political systems and those that were in power in her community and felt empowered to help carry out those systems. She trusted in those systems because of the relationship she had with local elected leaders, like the mayor and district ward leaders. She had a personal relationship with them and felt like her voice could be heard and the concerns of her community, which they lived, were heard. But this isn't the experience of everyone. After completing my bachelor's degree in political science, I too felt this desire to serve my community and joined the public sector, first as a District Representative in the California State Legislature, and then as an Assistant City Clerk, which I currently serve.

I started in the legislature to continue my passion for policy. This passion grew stronger and stronger when I was completing my capstone research on oil and gas severance tax policy in California. This project allowed me to hone my skills in qualitative analysis of state policy. It didn't take long to come to the conclusion that the reason why California, the third-largest oil-producing state in the country, is the only state without an oil and gas severance tax policy, was because of the large monetary contributions made by the oil and gas industry to political parties, candidates and those elected to represent the best interest of the community as a whole. The same policy question came up under both a democratic governor and a republican. But one thing was always the same every time the legislation died, a few big donors, who could contribute millions of dollars to defeat the measure always won, not the low-income communities fighting for better air quality, where the oil refineries were located. This caused me to question those same institutions that my grandmother had fought so hard to preserve.

After several years working for state government, I decided to shift to local government, where the daily quality of life is determined by those who we elect to represent us, more so than on a state level. Joining the local government, I could now see the effects first hand of policy decisions. The experience also opened my eyes to issues such as low voter turnout, or seeing the same dozen or so people at city council meetings every time and not the voice of the entire community being heard. As Assistant City Clerk, I serve as the frontline for the community and the political institutions. It's here that I hear every day, the mistrust in political systems from residents calling in. The challenges they have with interacting with local government and bureaucratic systems and the lack of trust prevents them from participating.

Trust in government is one of the most important foundations upon which our political systems are built. A high level of trust in government increases the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations. At a time where trust in government is low, its cities that can be innovators

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of change that can foster good governance policies to help grow community-wide trust in political systems. When trust is low in government, participation and voter turnout declines, which is the foundational aspect of American Democracy. Given the implications for democracy, as well as social justice, when too few people elect leaders, more attention is paid to the interests of small groups of people rather than to community-wide, pressing issues of equity and good governance. This is why I want to serve on the Public Ethics Commission, to bring my experience, education, and values to the community that I live in and help ensure that everyone in the community has access to an ethical government that works for them. And I believe that the ethics commission serves a vital role in a democratic government and represents the public's interest and work to maintain public trust.

### **2. What skills and experience will you bring to the Commission?**

I am dedicated to public service and serving communities, specifically those that are most marginalized. I am confident that the combination of my education, professional experience, and commitment to volunteer work and dedication to the community will allow me to be an ideal fit for the Public Ethics Commission. This experience is where I have learned the importance of organizations that work effortlessly to improve the lives of those in their community by fighting for inclusivity, integrity, diversity, and fairness.

While serving as a District Representative in the California Legislature, I was first exposed to ethical standards and what it meant to be a Form 700, Statement of Economic Interests filer. I attended multiple ethics training to ensure that I was aware of the provisions of the ethics code but also to ensure that the Senator I worked for was also aware of these standards. Additionally, in this role, a primary function of my duties was to cultivate beneficial partnerships for a lasting relationship with community partners during my tenure as a liaison between the Senator, neighborhood groups, residents, civic and business organizations and state agencies.

As a community liaison, I would meet with community groups to hear their concerns, assess the impact of legislation the community, and develop a set of policy recommendations for how best to address the concerns of the community. This required holding town hall events, where I would speak and represent the Senator in front of varying sizes of groups. This is when I was able to hone in on my public speaking skills and continue to develop my interpersonal skills while working collaboratively with a multitude of different groups. I have been able to continue my skills of working with community groups and interpreting different laws and policies at state level but also at a local level as an Assistant City Clerk.

After the 2016 presidential election, I looked for ways on how best I could serve my community. This led me to the City Clerk Department, where I currently serve as an Assistant City Clerk in the City of Berkeley. I chose the City Clerk Department because I saw this as an opportunity to serve as a compliance officer for good governance and to ensure that the local government was fair and open to all. In this role, I supervise a variety of functions within the department with a focus on municipal elections, campaign filings, conflict of interest requirements, and regulations for City advisory commissions. As a local filing officer, I have had extensive training from the

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state Fair Political Practices Commission regarding campaign finance laws and as well serve as the AB 1234 ethics coordinator for the City. These duties include reviewing all campaign related filings, identifying potential conflict of interests and serve as support staff for city appointed and elected officials and city staff.

My unit works directly with the combination of good governance ordinances like the Public Financing Program, the Berkeley Election Reform Act, the City Conflict of Interest Code, and have been tasked with implementing the Lobbyist Registration Act, which will go into effect on January 1, 2020. I have been fortunate to attend multiple trainings on project management, which has allowed me to apply those techniques as the project manager for the implementation of the Lobbyist Registration Act. With this project, I have been able to plan, organize, assign, direct, review and evaluate the work of assigned staff while analyzing and interpreting administrative procedures and regulations, legal documents, and local and state law to assist in the development and implementation of policies, procedures and work standards.

In addition to my employment, I have devoted my time to volunteer opportunities. In 2015, while living in Ventura County, I saw a lack of services for the LGBTQ community. This encouraged me to cofound Diversity Collective Ventura County, a nonpartisan community resource center that advocates for the rights of LGBTQ residents. As Co-Founder, Vice-President, and Board Secretary of the Center, I oversaw the development and implementation of grassroots community organizing through a coalition of community partners; spoke at city council meetings; drafted proposed policy to advocate for LGBTQ rights; and spearheaded an LGBTQ youth development program. I have always strived for better health services for the LGBTQ community, specifically LGBTQ youth. As Vice-President of the Center, I worked closely with Ventura County Board of Supervisors and staff to create a community- based Free Confidential and Anonymous Rapid HIV/AIDS Education and Prevention Program. Since relocating to Oakland, I have continued those efforts by working with groups like east Bay for Everyone, East Bay Young democrats and other groups with a focus on improving our community.

### **3. What issues, projects, or goals would you like to pursue while serving on the Commission?**

I believe that community involvement plays a critical role in the development of new policy and should be used to generate not only ideas for innovative expansion projects and their implementation, but also ideas to further improve existing programs. The Public Ethics Commission is charged with ensuring fairness, openness, honesty, and integrity and without an increase of public participation, those key elements don't apply to everyone. I am specifically interested in campaign finance laws and I have been able to see the effects on local government after the first successful election in Berkeley, since the Public Financing Program was implemented. By removing money from politics, participation has increased. Candidates are now forced out into the community because the program applies very strict rules on contribution limits and who may contribute to a candidate.

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I also feel that most government systems operate as one way feed, meaning that they provide the information to the community but don't allow for certain communication back from the community. Government happens in the background of daily life and with the increase of technology, there needs to be a fundamental shift in the way that government interacts with the people. New technology, like the Open Disclosure portal to simplify and visualize Oakland campaign finance data is an example. While it's a step in the right direction and great tool to increase transparency, it doesn't allow for feedback or open dialogue with our elected officials and those contributing to campaigns.

Also, I believe that regulating not only the contribution limits is important but also regulating who can contribute. For example, in Berkeley, a candidate is not able to accept contributions for any business or union. When we define a business entity the same we define an individual, we reduce the trust that those individuals have when deciding whether or not to participate in the process. There are ways of working around the Citizens United decision, and again, I feel that local city government has to be innovator on new systems. In Oakland, when there is a political action committee who can spend unlimited money, the voluntary spending limits for the campaign are suspended. This is unfair to the general public. Well-funded groups can have a bigger influence on the outcome of the election, leaving the average resident out of the equation. Individual donors should have the same amount of access or influence as PACs, and therefore contribution limits should apply.

#### **4. What do you think are the City's most pressing ethics, campaign finance, or transparency challenges?**

The most pressing ethics challenges from within the City, I believe is within compliance with the City's Conflict of Interest Code. I recently read that there are large numbers of employees who fall into a category of needing to file a Form 700 but the City has not been able to accomplish 100 percent compliance. As with many policies, the enforcement piece needs to be strong. By implementing policies, such as suspending employees without pay until there is compliance, the City would be able to be more transparent. City staff and elected officials should be held accountable regarding their conflict of interest filing requirements. An internal hotline for staff to call anonymously regarding potential violations of conflict of interest can also be an effective way of increasing compliance and increasing trust.

For campaign finance and transparency issues, I believe that contributions limits and campaign finance reform must continue to prevent those at the top having more of an influence from those at the bottom. Additionally, the development of new policies around officeholder accounts should be explored. By setting limits like \$25,000, Councilmembers are always seeking contributions to keep their office holder accounts full. I believe that officeholder accounts should be regulated similar to campaign committees. This would limit contributions and from whom the officeholder can accept contributions from.

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### 5. What else would you like the subcommittee to know as your application is considered?

I believe that I can bring a unique perspective to the Commission, having represented a community organization, handled campaign financing for both a candidate when working for the senate and also from the administrative side as being a filing officer. Thank you for your consideration and look forward to discussing further.

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## MICHAEL B. MACDONALD

### EDUCATION

**California State University Channel Islands · Camarillo, CA · B.A., Political Science · GPA 4.0 · 2017 to 2018**

Pi Sigma Alpha · Political Science National Honors Society

Capstone · Qualitative Research · *The Second Face of Power: Why does California not have an oil and gas severance tax?*

**City University of New York · New York, NY · A.A., Political Science, Public Policy · GPA 3.98 · 2012 to 2015**

Phi Theta Kappa · National Honors Society

### WORK EXPERIENCE

**City of Berkeley · Berkeley, CA · Assistant City Clerk**

**May 2019 to Present**

- Participate in the development and administration of the department's budget.
- Supervise a variety of functions within the Department with a focus on municipal elections, campaign filings, conflict of interest requirements, and regulations for City advisory commissions.
- Monitors campaign and conflict of interest statements; responds to technical questions from employees, commissioners, candidates and committees; and attends Fair Campaign Practices Commission meetings as staff support.

**California State Senate · Senator Scott Wiener · San Francisco, CA · District Representative**

**Nov. 2018 to May 2019**

- Advocate for LGBTQ and public safety by working with law enforcement officials, state agencies, fellow elected offices, and state department leaders.
- Research proposed legislation to determine its effects on the district and subsequently work with numerous entities to facilitate the implementation of the policy.

**County of Alameda · Registrar of Voters · Oakland, CA 2018 · ROVER Precinct Leader**

**Sep. 2018 to Nov. 2018**

- Prepared, dispatched, and distributed voting equipment; polling place supplies; and election emergency equipment.
- Served as the point person for hundreds of poll workers at more than twelve polling places.

**Diversity Collective VC · Ventura, CA · Co-Founder · Vice President · Board of Directors**

**June 2015 to Aug. 2018**

- Co-Founded the Community Resource Center, Ventura County's first non-profit LGBTQ community center that strives to build a County in which LGBTQ people can be healthy, equal, and complete members of the community.
- Coordinated with city agencies to revive the County's HIV/AIDS Education and Prevention Program and served as lead organizer for DCVC's Free HIV/AIDS Rapid Testing Program.
- Fundraised over 200,000 dollars by preparing grant applications and organizing annual events.
- Developed job descriptions, policy practices, employee handbook, and hiring procedures.

**City of Port Hueneme · Port Hueneme, CA · Assistant City Clerk**

**Sep. 2017 to June 2018**

- Updated the City's Retention Schedule and spearheaded the City's first records destruction in over ten years.
- Audited and updated the City contract system, risk management policies, and vendor insurance procedures.
- Served as Clerk to the City Council during Special City Council meetings, performed roll call, completed official minutes, coordinated presentations and public speakers, and ran audio and visual support.

**California State Senate · Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson · Oxnard, CA · District Representative**

**Dec. 2015 to Jan. 2017**

- Served as lead representative for K-12 education, transportation, housing, and homelessness issue areas by working closely with the Senator, constituents, district organizations, local governments, and state agencies.

**California State Senate · Senator Fran Pavley · Calabasas, CA · Office Manager**

**June 2015 to Jan. 2016**

- Communicated with constituents through the Legislative Constituent Management System.

**Fourth Wall Restaurant Group: Quality Meats · New York, NY · Captain Server**

**Feb. 2010 to May 2015**

- Served VIP customers at a renowned steakhouse that serves over 500 guests on a daily basis.

### NOTEWORTHY

**Alice B. Toklas LGBT Democratic Club · San Francisco, CA · Board of Directors**

**2019 – 2020**

**Model United Nations · Seattle, WA; Portland, OR; San Francisco, CA · Delegate**

**Sep. 2017 to May 2018**

- **Republic of Korea:** First Place Award – *Nuclear Non-Proliferation; Peaceful, Modern, and Sustainable Energy.*
- **Plurinational State of Bolivia:** Rapporteur Award – *Sustainable Digital Development: Globalization.*

**Instructionally Related Activities Fee Advisory Committee · Committee Member**

**Sep. 2017 to May 2018**

- Appointed by the V.P. of Student Affairs to assist in the allocation of a 750,000-dollar student fee budget.

**Ventura County Young Democrats · Ventura, CA · Treasurer**

**June 2016 to May 2018**

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