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CITY OF OAKLAND PUBLIC ETHICS COMMISSION

Commissioner Application



Name: Janani Ramachandran

Mailing: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED] City Council District: 1

Are you an Oakland resident? Yes No Years of Residency in Oakland: 1.5 years

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

N/A

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. Tamil, Spanish
7. How did you hear about this vacancy? Reached out to Whitney Barazoto and Mayor Schaff's office regarding possible vacancies.

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

1. Name: Judge Tara M. Flanagan

[REDACTED]

(Please note - this is Judge Flanagan's private chamber number)

2. Name: Steve Toben

[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.

[REDACTED]

Date: 10/26/19

See Supplemental Questions on next page →

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Supplemental Questions

On a separate page, please answer the following four questions:

1. **Why do you want to serve on the Public Ethics Commission?**
2. **What skills and experience will you bring to the Commission?** (Include any governmental experience, activities with civic and business organizations, neighborhood groups, or any other experience that would contribute to your effectiveness as a Commissioner.)
3. **What issues, projects, or goals would you like to pursue while serving on the Commission?**
4. **What do you think are the City's most pressing ethics, campaign finance, or transparency challenges?**
5. **What else would you like the subcommittee to know as your application is considered?**

Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. on **Friday, November 1, 2019**, and must include the following materials:

1. Signed Application.
2. Answers to the Supplemental Questions
3. Your resume

Applications may be submitted by mail, email or fax to PEC staff:

Public Ethics Commission
Attn: Whitney Barazoto
1 Frank Ogawa Plaza, Room 104
Oakland, CA 94612
ethicscommission@oaklandca.gov
Fax: (510) 238-3315

For questions, please call (510) 238-3593.
Web: www.oaklandca.gov/pec

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Janani Ramachandran Public Ethics Commissioner Application Supplemental Questions

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

I am interested in serving on the Public Ethics Commission because I want to be part of the solution for meaningful change that our current political and governance systems need. I believe that transparent local governments hold the key to such impactful change. As a native of Alameda County, I am aware of the rich cultural and economic diversity that make us unique. I am also keenly aware of the growing multitude of challenges that come with this widening diversity; gentrification, homelessness, climate change, police violence, inter-familial violence, and much more. I want to engage Oakland residents to allow their voices to be heard by electing officials and implementing ballot measures that they find most effective to tackle these complex challenges. I want to be a part of Oakland's most influential ethics institution, and hold our elected officials and city departments accountable to their constituents. I want to use my position as a Commissioner to help engage every resident of Oakland, and build their trust in local government. Above all, I want to ensure that corruption does not interfere with these essential democratic process, and plague our city government.

The City of Oakland has the potential to bring truly innovative energy to these important endeavors, and I aspire to bring my own drive and creativity towards this work. Serving on the Public Ethics Commission would be an invaluable opportunity to build upon my lifelong passion for being engaged in civic processes, and leadership skills gained from advocacy work in various social justice causes.

2. What skills and experience will you bring to the Commission? (Include any governmental experience, activities with civic and business organizations, neighborhood groups, or any other experience that would contribute to your effectiveness as a Commissioner.)

As a law student with a passion for social justice, as a scholar of open governance, as a queer woman of color, and as a native of Alameda County, I believe that I will bring a fresh and valuable perspective to the Public Ethics Commission.

I have maintained a lifelong interest in understanding methods to improve government transparency and accountability. As an honors scholar at Stanford University's Center for Democracy, Development, and Rule of Law, I studied comparative government systems, and analyzed structural solutions to combat corruption, enhance the efficiency of bureaucratic processes, and increase political accountability. In addition, I served as an elected undergraduate Senator; my work on the undergraduate Senate Appropriations Committee improved my understanding of various oversight mechanisms and tools that can operate to increase transparency to my fellow peers, classmates, and constituents.

My work experience in public health has also contributed to my understanding of how nonprofits can effectively connect with local governments to allow their voices to be heard, and the variety of ways in which government officials can be responsive, or fail to be responsive, to such outreach. One of my responsibilities involved spearheading a domestic violence advocacy program for a network of community health clinics, and developing ways to connect with local government bodies as well as coalitions of nonprofits with similar goals. I collaborated with different community stakeholders to launch a stream of public outreach campaigns geared towards encouraging immigrant survivors of domestic violence to

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access services; this resulted in a large increase in requests for services from immigrant communities and other marginalized populations. I learned to identify the best strategies to liaise and engage with the public, and translate these needs to relevant government bodies.

My experiences at Berkeley Law have exposed me to many local ordinances, boards and legal institutions in the City of Oakland. During my time as a clinical student at the East Bay Community Law Center's Housing Clinic, representing low-income tenants in unlawful detainer proceedings, I often interacted with the Oakland Housing, Residential Rent, and Relocation Board, as well as with staff at the City Attorney's office working on affirmative litigation to support tenants' rights. Despite the many challenges tenants continue to face, I learned how Oakland's local ordinances are incredibly progressive and justice-oriented, and how individuals employed in city institutions are deeply concerned with incorporating the voices of its diverse citizens. In addition, my work with Bay Area Legal Aid's Domestic Violence Prevention Project helped me understand the various struggles of low-income survivors of domestic violence in Oakland, particularly those from immigrant communities. It was heartbreaking to see how survivors from marginalized populations are frequently unable to access systems of justice, or how such legal systems are manipulated against them. However, working with a grassroots legal aid agency to overcome such challenges and provide legal representation was a meaningful way to understand the crucial role of civic institutions, and how they can bridge the gap in accessing justice.

My legal education has grounded my lifelong commitment to working with various stakeholders to enhance government accountability. I have acquired invaluable tools to support these goals by understanding the workings of administrative law, the nuances of civil procedure, various ethics requirements of those in the legal profession, and how complicated ethical situations in the law can be addressed and overcome. Moreover, my current role as a Board Director at the Family Violence Appellate Project has exposed me to methods by which institutions with fiduciary and oversight responsibilities can hold employees of a legal nonprofit accountable. I have helped critically examine financial statements, tax returns, and audits in order to promote transparency for the nonprofit's clients and donors. In addition, my experiences serving as a Board Member of Men Creating Peace have given me incredible exposure to a grassroots Oakland-based nonprofit focused on domestic violence batterer intervention. By working on issues related to strategic development and organizational growth, and well as more day-to-day issues involving partnership development, fundraising, and marketing, I have been exposed to the various challenges, as well as opportunities, that similar small nonprofits experience in our city, and have been able to brainstorm ways in which governments can support such civic organizations.

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

I am interested in helping the PEC develop and pursue its Enforcement processes, and continue to expand the number and types of cases it investigates. Given that there has been an uptick in enforcement complaints received in the past two years, I want to support the Commission in being able to conduct speedy, efficient investigations, and implement pragmatic administrative or civil penalties. I would also hope to initiate improved public outreach efforts to better publicize the penalties imposed for unethical conduct, and thus more effectively deter such behavior. I would hope to use my position on the PEC to encourage more city employees and members of the public to report violations of ethics, campaign finance, and transparency laws, in order to build faith in the city government's ability to hold its employees and elected officials accountable.

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I am also particularly interested in joining the Campaign Finance Subcommittee, and helping the PEC continue to hear the perspectives of diverse Oakland residents in understanding their barriers to engaging in the political process. Given my work with low-income communities in Oakland during my legal internships with Bay Area Legal Aid's Domestic Violence Prevention Program, as well as with tenants facing eviction through the East Bay Community Law Center Housing Clinic, I am well aware of the multitude of challenges marginalized populations face to simply survive, and their barriers to accessing justice and participating in the political process. While there has been already substantial progress on research and outreach to Oakland residents, I hope to be able to continue to engage with community members and nonprofit partners to develop effective recommendations for campaign finance reforms.

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

I believe that the public's perception of corruption among city institutions and elected officials continues to be the City of Oakland's most pressing challenge. Scandals regarding collusion between government agencies, city officials, and private contractors continue to plague public opinion about the prevalence of city corruption, and overshadow the concerted efforts and dedicated attempts of institutions, including the PEC, to promote accountability in the government. The work of investigative journalism in recent years has played an important role in bringing corrupt officials to justice, but has also increased public criticism on a host of issues such as bribery from Oakland Coliseum Authority officials in recent negotiations, and awarding suspiciously monopolistic contracts to California Waste Solutions. Law enforcement institutions have particularly faced heightened ethics-based criticism in recent years, including Harry Hu's highly-publicized admissions of taking bribes from leaders of organized criminal networks, and OPD's alleged failure to investigate sexual misconduct committed by officers.

However, I also see meaningful opportunities to change these perceptions as a result of the PEC's previous and ongoing efforts. For example, when corrupt dealings in Oakland's Planning and Building Department were unveiled, the media also gave coverage to the efforts of PEC to investigate the alleged bribes taken by code enforcement officers and their collusion with landlords. I believe that more reporting and awareness of the enforcement actions taken by the PEC can help improve public opinion, and build faith in our government institutions.

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

I firmly believe that I will bring a variety of skills and professional experiences that would contribute to the growth and flourishing of Oakland's Public Ethics Commission. My passion for accountable government along with my energetic personality, creative, entrepreneurial spirit, and ease in connecting with a variety of personalities will serve the goals of the commission. Thank you for your consideration.

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JANANI RAMACHANDRAN

EDUCATION

University of California, Berkeley School of Law: J.D. Candidate, May 2020

Stanford University: B.A. in International Relations with Honors in Democracy, Development, and Rule of Law, June 2014

WORK EXPERIENCE

Alameda County Superior Court; Oakland, CA – Judicial Extern for Hon. Judge Tara M. Flanagan, Jan 2018-May 2019

- Researched new domestic violence service laws and drafted new court forms for self-represented petitioners.
- Conducted an evaluation of local batterer-intervention programs based on in-person observations and interviews.
- Wrote legal memos on restraining orders and intersecting issues in family and criminal courts.

East Bay Community Law Center Housing Clinic; Berkeley, CA – Law Student, Aug 2018-Dec 2018

- Represented tenants in unlawful detainer proceedings. Made court appearances, conducted initial client interviews and home visits, drafted and responded to discovery requests, wrote and filed answers and subsequent motions.

Bay Area Legal Aid- Domestic Violence Prevention; Oakland, CA – Law Clerk, Summer 2018

- Wrote in-depth legal memos on procedural issues in restraining order, child custody, and divorce cases involving survivors. Worked closely with clients to develop trial strategy, and prepared direct examinations.

Mary's Center for Maternal and Infant Health; Washington DC Metro Area – Feb 2015-July 2017

- **Social Services Coordinator** (*June 2016-July 2017*): Designed and managed inaugural Domestic Violence Advocacy Program across five health clinics, developed partnerships with government agencies, conducted trainings for medical providers, supervised domestic violence advocates, and created community outreach programs. Managed a minority health education program, supervised staff, liaised with Maryland state health agencies.
- **Family Support Worker** (*Feb 2015-May 2016*): Worked with at-risk mothers through intensive home-visiting services to provide crisis case management. Liaised with government agencies to expand home visiting programs.

Hewlett and Flora Family Foundation; Menlo Park, CA and Gujarat, India – Fellow, Summer 2014

- Identified and visited prospective grantees for inaugural anti-violence against women initiative in Gujarat.
- Evaluated grantee programs in Haiti through in-country site visits and interviews.

Other Internships: **Ford Foundation;** New Delhi, Summer 2013; **Ashoka Venezuela;** Caracas, Venezuela –Summer 2013;

United States Department of State –Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations; Washington DC–Summer 2012

LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Family Violence Appellate Project – Board Director: May 2018-Present

- Provide organizational governance and oversight, feedback on growth and inclusivity, and development efforts.

Berkeley Resistance Against Inter-Partner Violence (BRAIV) – Founder and President: August 2018-Present

- Founded new student organization to advocate for domestic violence survivors through court-watch programs.
- Partner with local domestic violence agencies to raise awareness within the Berkeley Law community.

Berkeley Law Women of Color Collective – Executive Board Member: March 2018-Present

- Lead art-based activist efforts and performances to foster community and campus-wide dialogue on race and gender.

Alipato Project – Volunteer Law Student: December 2017-December 2018

- Conducted client intakes and legal research for domestic violence tort cases against abusive former partners.

Stanford University Undergraduate Senate – Senator, Chair of Academic Affairs Committee: 2011-2012

- Founded committee to improve academic advising by liaising with faculty and administrators; led team of five.
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INTERESTS AND HONORS

Languages: Tamil (native fluency); Spanish (professional proficiency)

Interests: Theater (actor and director in amateur productions); music (former lead singer in local band); Muay Thai.

Awards: **Asian Pacific American Bar-Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom Scholarship:** May 2019

California Women Lawyers Foundation Nancy E. O'Malley Scholarship: March 2019

Women Lawyers of Alameda County and Judge Stuart Hing Scholarship: October 2018

Berkeley Law Dean's Fellowship: August 2017

Prosser Prize, Domestic Violence Law: January 2019

