

## Niles McDonald - Statement of Purpose

Despite one professional doctorate, two decades of political engagement, and three different positions within our civic structure, I've made little progress in developing or internalizing a coherent ontology of who I am or the systems I live in. Academics sharpened my mind, lived experience gifted me perspective, and my career opened the panels on the inner workings of government. An MPA at Evergreen would put me in a position to combine these assets. I'm hoping further study will finally help me find an answer to a question I've been hunting: what is this whole "government" thing, why does it work like that, and what are the interactions between policy and people?

As an undergraduate at The Evergreen State College I stumbled into a law and justice class taught by the late José Gómez and took to the field with enthusiasm. Professor Gómez helped to stoke a fire for the law which propelled me through my JD. I also found a deep interest in complex systems, particularly in complex social-governmental interactions while studying counter-insurgency strategy as the backbone of my undergraduate degree. The two combined taught me something vitally important I've been chewing on for a while now - that everything from access to the necessities of life to the particulars of art cannot exist without a functioning government. We are what the world allows us to be, and those allowances come in the form of law and policy.

While pursuing my JD, I delved further into concerns of policy, law, and justice. In a critical race theory course, I drilled down into the particulars of zoning laws, red lining, the development of the suburbs, and the policies surrounding VA loans, all of which made clear to me that specific public policy can make either progress or apartheid. While studying this, I lived in New Orleans, and could see first-hand the result of poor public policy on the survivors of hurricanes - there are neighborhoods where people are still waiting for FEMA relief funds, and those neighborhoods are black.

While a student at Tulane I also worked on a class actions suit over prison torture of disabled adults, a mass medical tort surrounding a dangerous birth control device targeted at poor women of color, disability education lawsuits, and juvenile defense cases. After graduating, I worked in public defense for a few years. I've become deeply and personally familiar with systematic injustice.

I now work as an attorney for Adult Protective Services where I regularly receive training on public policy and where I argue, first hand, the court cases that result from those policies. I also work as a judge pro-tem in Thurston county, where I mostly handle the end-result of poverty. Every time the DOL or DSHS change a rule, I handle the people who lose their license or housing as a result of that policy and find themselves swept up in the criminal justice system as a result. I want to better understand why and how this works.

I wish to pursue an education in public administration for three reasons. First, I want to better my understanding of public policy so I can do a better job as a judge and as an attorney. Second, I want to expand my professional options: I can move up in multiple roles within the state with the knowledge and degree; I can expand my practice if I ever go private. Third, I just genuinely like learning and I think this topic is important.

There are three reasons I want to study at Evergreen in particular. The first is that I am an alum and love the school - I'd like to be part of the Evergreen community again. The second is that I live in Olympia and it is geographically advantageous. The third is that nowhere else will offer the opportunity for interdisciplinary study I crave. Part of what I want to study is the niche field of Domicology, the lifecycle of buildings. I want to study this primarily from a public policy perspective - why we build what we build, what rules we use, and how it impacts the surrounding neighborhoods. An important aspect of this will be developing an understanding of urban ecology. Evergreen's MES program has some phenomenal courses and scholars who can help me expand my knowledge there while I work toward developing a policy theory in the MPA. Ultimately, I'd like to help battle against the unhealthy, unethical, and stupid building

trends in this country and I cannot think of a better place to launch that war than from Evergreen.

This brings me to the MPA's mission. After living in the Deep South and working on cases involving disability rights, civil rights, elder law, and criminal justice, I am deeply, deeply aware of the unfairness in our systems and Evergreen stands out in its efforts to promote diversity and fight for equity and fairness. I'm not interested in going to some ivy-league and perpetuating existing issues. Evergreen's MPA mission assures me I won't likely be making things worse or encouraging those who would.

Please consider me for your program. I'm deeply interested and believe I would both gain a lot of knowledge and be able to contribute usefully to the other student's education.

With warmth and good cheer,

-Niles McDonald