

Jon Wainwright: Hello, and welcome to another Policy Change In Practice edition of CAP-impact. I am Jon Wainwright and we are talking with Erin Scott, the Board Chair of the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence. Erin, thank you so much for joining us today.

Erin Scott: Thank you.

JW: So, today we're going to be talking about the Partnership's main priority for 2018, which I know you guys just had a rally about this last week, which is funding for domestic violence awareness, prevention, and that is a rather large goal. Let's dive in a little bit. What's the main way you're working on trying to get this? Is there specific legislation? Are you working through the budget bill?

ES: Let me just tell you first, what the ask is, just to frame it.

JW: Okay. Yeah.

ES: And maybe just a little context. Domestic violence work is already funded by the state budget and has been funded at more or less the same level for quite a long time. That funding basically is looking at the initial emergency response.

That's an oversimplification, because there are a bunch of strategies that different agencies employ - providing shelter, providing emergency legal services, providing the initial days of counseling, etc. So that's currently funded.

JW: And is that out of the General Fund, or is that a Special Fund?

ES: That is out of the General Fund. It's supplemented by some federal funds, but the piece that's in the state budget is in the General Fund pot.

And really, the way I look at it is the domestic violence is forty-ish years in. It took that journey over the forty years to get domestic violence even recognized as an issue, to get the criminal laws in place that are in place now, to get the civil laws in place that are in place now. And it's really; the conversation has been largely about emergency response writ large, like, how do we get people stabilized? That's been the thought about it.

What we're asking for is for the state to invest in, not to leave that other investment behind - because unfortunately that's still needed and it's essentially part of our society's safety net here in California at this point. We're asking the state to invest in proactive and long-term solutions.

To really, if we're going to move towards a California free of domestic violence, having just that emergency response in place - even though it's effective; even though it's not just one day, two days, we're talking about a long emergency response - but still.

JW: It's still reactive to another problem.

ES: Something has already happened. So it both doesn't deal with the prevention piece but it also doesn't deal with some of the longer term issues that people are dealing with.

So, it's \$20.6 million that's been in the state budget for this emergency response, and we're asking for an additional \$20.6 million to be available for these other types of strategies.

JW: Okay. And that first \$20.6 million that's been in the budget, you said that it's been about the same for years. Has that at all gone up with inflation and adjusted for cost of living? Or has it been about the same for as long as it's been in there?

ES: Not really. No. At one point, I think in 2010-11, I think it was about \$20.4, and I'm not sure exactly when it went up to \$20.6 but, marginal.

JW: But it's one of those things where there's also, a need for it just to grow to be able to keep up with what's going on in reality?

ES: Yes. That would also be fantastic. And, you know, most people aren't familiar with this. But if you're organization serving domestic violence survivors, a large part of your money does come from different government sources. My agency, for example, gets city funds, county funds, federal funds, etc. And generally speaking those funds stay flat over time - even though I have staff that I would like to give a cost of living increase to. Goodness, my staff is trying to live somewhere near Oakland and the housing prices go up and down.

JW: Generally just up and up.

ES: Exactly, but these government funds generally stay flat. But yes, you are pointing to another huge problem.

But what we're trying to get here is another pot of money, so the state investing in these proactive and longer term solutions so that these organizations who have been chomping at the bit - both the organizations are currently funded by the state, but lots of other organizations working in the state with domestic violence survivors in a variety of ways can put all their fabulous ideas to work. Some of them maybe have had that work funded a little bit in the past. Prevention funding, however, is way less than it should be. But it's hard to get domestic violence prevention funding.

JW: I feel like with a lot of things it's tougher to try to say, "Hey! We're trying to stop this thing from happening." Rather than being able to point to a specific problem or a specific event and say, "Hey we need to do something to course correct after this."

ES: Right. Exactly. Now's the time to, you know we have forty years' experience now to just react and clean up, and we know that piece is needed. And if we don't go address

root causes, we're not ... we're just going to be in this place where we're reacting, reacting, reacting.

JW: Just a vicious cycle.

ES: Right.

JW: So, this next chunk of money that you're advocating, this would also be out of the General Fund?

ES: Yes. That would be out of the General Fund.

JW: So with this funding, are there any agencies that you're working with in terms of trying to get this? And I use the term agencies in broad sense of general state agencies. But are there any agencies you're working with on trying to get this implemented?

ES: So, partner agencies?

JW: Yes, similar to other organizations. Or I guess, what I'm getting at is more like, are there any state agencies that you're partnering with?

ES: We don't have any formal partners at this point. It's still somewhat early in the legislative process.

JW: True, the Governor's budget proposal comes out on ... a couple days from now.

ES: Yeah, but we always work very closely with the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault. And, I've named other partners in other conversations with you, but Western Center on Law and Poverty, Legal Aid Association of California, there are a number of organizations that we work with. We haven't formally partnered with anyone yet, on this particular request.

JW: Gotcha.

ES: But also, we work very closely with the California District Attorneys Association because not all of our clients want to go through a criminal prosecution process, but some do. And so, depending on, politically, how things roll out, we do have a broad base of partners and supporters that we could potentially go to.

As I'm sure you're aware with a budget ask, sometimes other people are doing their own budget asks and so it's, you know, you can support each other, but usually, it's really our members that we're going to be looking to, to do a lot of the lifting on this kind of bill, in part because having the Legislators hear from their local constituents when it's a General Fund issue, I think is really important.

JW: Yeah, I think especially with the General Fund where you're competing with a whole bunch of other people on one set pot, rather than having a special fund where you've got your money set aside.

ES: Right, and there are a lot of things that are needed, so it's understandable.

JW: Alright, sounds like it's a decent amount of work you've got cut out for you this year then.

ES: Yes, just a little request.

both laugh

ES: You know, I think it's never the perfect time for this kind of request, you could always think of a reason why you shouldn't push for basically doubling the state money, but it's also way overdue. There are a lot of programs across the state piecing together, I always with the non-profits we're stapling and duct-taping things together on the side, putting forth prevention programming and longer-term solutions as best we can with no consistent financial support. There's a lot of expertise on the precipice waiting for the funding to put a lot of this in place.

JW: And I would imagine, once you can get some of these preventative measures in place, it's going to be cheaper to prevent this from happening rather than continually having to react.

ES: Right, well of course. If we can decrease the rates of domestic violence, obviously that's fantastic. If we can look at longer term solutions for people who've experienced significant trauma - the PTSD that domestic violence survivors' experience is very similar to what our veterans are experiencing, people who are living in poverty are experiencing. There should be, in my opinion, a society-wide look at this and how we're dealing with it. But if we can get better longer term housing assistance programs in place, more counseling, longer term counseling programs, and also more community based solutions.

For example, the criminal justice response, which advocates fought long and hard in place to get acknowledged, doesn't work for everybody. There are many communities that don't have good relationships with the police. The police are underfunded themselves. They always have to prioritize what they're going to address and what they're not going to address.

There are a lot of different community based accountability options that people are starting to look at like domestic violence, a specific restorative justice approach. Which a lot of public schools are taking on now more restorative justice types of approaches. So, it's not just the prevention piece, there's also some of types of responsive pieces that we're looking at to serve folks who aren't currently being served well. And also to

look at, again, what we can do for the longer term impacts so that we don't leave someone after 6-12 months who is still severely impacted.

JW: Who still needs more support.

ES: Right. From the violence.

JW: Well, it sounds like a good chunk of work, but good work to be doing. So thank you so much for taking the time today to talk with us.

ES: Sure. Thanks for having me.