

**Jon Wainwright:** Hello, and welcome to Episode 3 of the clinic. We're back with Michelle and Keri. Thanks for coming back.

**Michelle Evans:** Thanks for having us back.

**Keri Firth:** Yes, great to be back.

**Jon:** So you have a bill. The next step is, I would imagine, finding supporters for that bill. Obviously you've got one vote. You've got your author Maienschein, but when it comes to looking for other supporters and I'm thinking like the grassroots level, if you think, maybe another way of putting it, thinking of it like people outside, other members who are going to need to vote on the bill, but if you're talking about like the coalition building on the outside. The people in the real world that you're trying to get to put pressure on their legislators. How do you go about determining which groups that you reach out to, to support your bill.

**Michelle:** One of the things we are learning as we are working specifically in child welfare is that there kind of a top ten special interest groups that really introduce most of the child welfare legislation...

**Jon:** Okay.

**Michelle:** For California. So as the net for different interest groups, one person would say 'Hey, go talk to this person' and we'll go talk to that person and through those efforts of being referred and referred and referred, we've eventually pretty much been able to meet most of those people.

**Jon:** Okay, who's in that top ten?

**Keri:** We have CYC, which is the California Youth Connection.

**Jon:** Okay.

**Keri:** They represent former and current foster youth. The California Welfare Directors Association, CWDA.

**Michelle:** Those are probably the top two, like almost everyone that we talk to, one of their first will be 'Well, have you talked to the CWDA and to the CYC?' It almost feels like they don't say it, but it almost seems like they're waiting for signals.

**Keri:** Yes.

**Jon:** Gotcha.

**Keri:** For those two groups.

**Michelle:** From those two main groups

**Jon:** Okay I can see like the parallels, like in the education world and anything that's going to affect the teachers everyone's going to wait to see whether the CTA is going to weigh in on this and then we'll put our chips on the table accordingly.

**Keri:** For our bill, these groups that we're talking about, we had already met with them to develop our policy proposal, it's the same groups that we were meeting with last semester when we were just developing a policy proposal. Now that we have a bill, we're circling back to all of those groups to give them the bill language and try to get their support.

**Jon:** Okay. And I'm sure it's helpful too that you've already talked to these people.

**Keri:** Yes.

**Jon:** And started building that relationship. So it sounds like you've got these main two and probably eight, ten or so others after that. What's been your process in terms of reaching out to these groups? Like, how do you go about trying to get on their radar?

**Michelle:** We usually will send an email. We'll track down their email and that feels like the least intruding way of reaching out. Every once in a while we'll make a call but usually we'll start by sending an email. We'll send them our fact sheet about the bill, the bill language; give them a little bit of background. Especially with these interest groups that we met with last semester, we were really excited to let them know, 'Guess what? The things we talked to you about is actually happening!'

**Jon:** It's real now!

**Michelle:** It's real, we have bill language, here's our fact sheet. We'd really like to meet with you to get your feedback; you know your feedback was really important to us in the development of this and will continue to be important as we move forward.

**Jon:** Gotcha.

**Keri:** And telling them that we are participating in the Legislative and Public Policy Clinic, especially for new groups that we didn't meet with last semester, it helps us get in the door and get meetings with them.

**Jon:** Oh I'm sure. I'm sure name dropping Rex Frazier's helpful every now and then.

**Keri:** It helps a lot.

**Jon:** So when you're talking to these different groups, obviously, something that you do in any kind of messaging operation is you tailor the message a little bit, something is going to seem more salient to one group than it would be to another. How do you go about tailoring how you message your bill to these different groups?

**Michelle:** Well it depends on the organization, like you said, generally there's a few main points that we need to cover with everyone that we meet with. But for example, when we met with the SEIU which is the labor union for the case workers, we met with that specific sector, we knew that we wanted to talk to them about how this bill will affect caseworkers and so we went in prepared to have that conversation or if we meet with a foster parent association. There is a brand new foster parent association in the area so we are really concerned about protecting those interest and so, you know, it's the broad message and then tailoring it to and being open to their feedback regarding, 'hey have you thought about how this is going to affect this population specifically?'

**Jon:** Okay, and do you find that with different groups, do you find that you are like really having to re-tailor your message or is there a really solid core of the bill that seems to appeal to most of these groups that you are targeting?

**Keri:** There- there is a solid core. With each group we want to get their unique perspective so as Michelle was saying, say we may want a perspective of case workers or the perspective of foster family agencies. Our core message remains the same with each group that we go to. We tell them about the purpose of the bill being to improve retention of foster parents and placement stability for foster youth, and the fact that most placement coaching through our pilot program will improve the retention of foster parents and the placement stability. So we give that same message to every group that we meet with, but the questions that we ask are specific to their perspective such as that of case workers or foster family agencies.

**Michelle:** So one of the consistent questions that we've gotten from all of the interest groups is 'how does this fit in to the statutory framework of the CCR?' Which is the roll

out of the Child Welfare Reform in California, and in 2014, and it's still in the process of implementation. So while this does fit really nicely with the CCR, they want to see that we know about the CCR, that we've been thoughtful about this and really one of the main purposes is for children to have family based care. And to improve support and retention of foster parents and so that is clearly what we're working on, we just include that in our messaging so that we are explicit about it rather than implicit.

**Jon:** Gotcha. So how, well I guess its two questions here, one is since we've talked about these other kind of big welfare reforms that have been happening recently, what are those major reforms?

**Michelle:** Well the CCR was a major overhaul of child welfare.

**Jon:** Yeah I guess that's where we want to start.

**Michelle:** In California and the CCR really, I think, one of the main, well there's multiple, broadly they want children to be institutionalized. Children that were in residential care, in group homes, they want to set children as much as possible and almost, and I think, I'd love it to be 100% of children recognizing there might be children who just need, really need that. But overall, to step down children from those levels of care to have a family based setting to care for them and to care for their needs. That was the main overarching big, also overhaul, pay raise and they've also taken- there used to be different classifications of kinship families versus foster families versus-

**Keri:** adopted families-

**Michelle:** adopted families categories of people who were taking care of children.

**Jon:** Okay.

**Michelle:** and now they're lumping that into one process of how these families are-become licensed to be able to care for children so that it's all the same.

**Keri:** And they're all being called Resource families.

**Jon:** So how does your bill fit within that new CCR framework?

**Michelle:** So our bill promotes family based care and helping to prepare more foster families, more kinship families, more families to be able to care for children in their homes and provide the best level of care that they possibly can provide. Now some

families receive more assistance than others. There's different levels of care that there's therapeutic foster homes, there's group homes, there's families that contract privately with foster family agencies and then there are families who go to the county, approach the state, and they're kind of the everyday foster parent that aren't fitting into a special category

**Jon:** Okay.

**Michelle:** And those parents are- who we are really wanting to target, a lot of time those families come in, they receive- well state mandates they receive 12 hours of training before they are placed with depending on the county, they could receive more training and then they wait and then they get their first child placed in their home. Ready to go, that's it.

**Jon:** There you go.

**Michelle:** They're done, and you know, when you think about it they're great kids but they've just experienced a major trauma, they got removed from their family and now they're in a home that's a completely foreign environment to them and they're foreign to this family.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Michelle:** And they need support. They need support to know how to meet the individualized needs of these kids. Even if those child's needs are rising to the level of a specific special need that would require by state mandate a higher level of intervention, these families are still under a tremendous burden to meet all of the needs of this child.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Michelle:** And so part of the CCR is to offer improved training support and retention of foster families which will lead to placement stability for children because if these families aren't having the support they need, the natural consequence is difficulties with placement stability for children.

**Jon:** Gotcha.

**Michelle:** And then when children are removed from those homes, that's another trauma. I just saw a stat yesterday that every year, on average, for each child that's been in the system for a year, they've experienced at least 3.64 placements. Within that

year, and I don't know about you, maybe college days, you might have had times where you moved four times.

**Jon:** Not in a year, but...

**Michelle:** I have, I've had that experience.

**Jon:** Oh my gosh.

**Michelle:** It's a lot and that's with having all of the things- you know, I was an adult and I had all the things that I needed taken care of but still for the circumstances moved multiple times, these are children that move from a different family setting to a different family setting and sometimes changing schools, so we're re-traumatizing them.

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Michelle:** Making it more difficult to meet their needs for the next family, and this is really a significant issue and one of the, I think, antithesis of the CCR and we feel like providing this post-placement coaching as support to these families to help them, coach them, in caring for these children, helping with their behavioral needs, the whole gambit will really, really help support the goals of the CCR.

**Jon:** Gotcha.

**Michelle:** And having more families prepared to have these children in their homes.

**Jon:** Yeah, so do you find now that, I feel like we've gone through your elevator pitch, maybe a longer version of that, does that seem to land with most folks when you talk, or are there certain elements of that where you get more pushback on than others.

**Michelle:** I think it resonates with people, people like it. No one's going to say that they don't like this bill.

**Jon:** Okay.

**Michelle:** The next question is, well how are you going to do it and how much is this going to cost? And what's the price tag going to be?

**Keri:** And recurring concern is who the coaches will be, there's concern that they would be social workers, which that's not our intention because the reason for the coaches is

because the social workers are already overworked and overburdened and can't step in and help the families with these needs that come up and so once we go through the elevator pitch, that's usually one of the first questions that we get.

**Jon:** Gotcha.

**Michelle:** And we do want them to be qualified social workers, just not social workers with a caseload. This is just to offset what's already happening.

**Jon:** So less pushback and looking for more clarity on things. That seems to be the take.

**Keri:** Mhm, yes.

**Michelle:** Yes, they usually want those kinds of things cleared up for them and to see if we've thought about it, and usually they're things we've thought about but occasionally we'll be like 'oh well that's a really good question, we need to think about how that's going to fit in' so overall it's just been really positive.

**Jon:** And it sounds like too, most the groups you've talked to are at the state level, kind of groups that represent foster youth, former foster youth, foster parents kind of at a statewide level. What about any local groups, have you had convers- you know some of them that would just represent you know folks in one city or one county. You have started having conversations with those folks yet?

**Keri:** We haven't yet, we do have a meeting with the California Welfare Directors Association and they represent all of the county welfare directors. During our meeting with them this week, we are going to ask if they can identify an individuals or groups that we should be talking to in counties that may be especially struggling with this problem.

**Michelle:** And early on we did meet with folks in one county...

**Jon:** Okay.

**Michelle:** not too far outside of Sacramento and got feedback from multiple people working there in child welfare and that was helpful, and then from there we've just gone bigger because we needed the statewide support.

**Jon:** Gotcha. Okay. And this kind of leads me to kind of where I want to go next which is transitioning from outside the building to inside the building. Like we said, got one vote, you've got an author. Um, so what's the next step towards building support in the building? Are there people you have in mind? Are you building a list of co-authors, kind of what would have been the next steps on kind of more of the inside baseball track?

**Keri:** Well we got some surprising news last week about co-authors, we have 8 co-authors.

**Jon:** Okay, so you've got nine votes!

**Keri:** Yes!

**Michelle:** Yes, we actually have nine votes and actually they were both from the assembly side and the senate side, from both sides of the aisle. Both Republican and Democrat so we were happy to see that it was well balanced so far. And you know that was the very first thing that Christine Rose, who is the legislative person we are working with in Assembly Member Maienschein's office, that's the first thing she did. She drafted a co-author letter and sent it to us and we worked together to create a letter that was sent to all of the Assembly Members and Senators in the building, requesting them to co-author this bill and giving them a little bit of information about that, and so that was actually the first thing that happened after our bill went into print.

**Jon:** Okay.

**Michelle:** And now it's, you know, we're having some results. We were so surprised.

**Keri:** We were very surprised, we didn't know that we had any co-authors and then she sent us an email saying we had eight.

**Jon:** That's fantastic. So next step here would be committee, I'm assuming, do you- well actually before we dive into that, that's really more the next podcast, so till then. Thanks for taking the time to talk with us today.

**Keri:** Thank you.

**Michelle:** Thank you.