

**Jon Wainwright:** Welcome back to CAP-impact's *The Clinic*. I'm Jon Wainwright and we're here with Keri Firth and Michelle Evans, who have just come out from their first policy committee hearing. Without getting too much into the details, and by details I mean the final vote. How'd it go?

**Michelle Evans:** So good!

**Keri Firth:** It went really well. The day of we were, we felt very prepared but still nervous because it was our first hearing, didn't know what the outcome would be but as we mentioned in the previous episode, we had met with staff members from all of the member's offices and we felt pretty positive that they would all, or at least most of them, would come out in support.

**JW:** Okay.

**ME:** And we met with all of the main interests groups and we were confident we didn't have any major opposition so we went in feeling good but still just not, you just don't know how it's going to go.

**KF:** We had worked so hard since August on this and so this is like...

**ME:** This is a big day...

**KF:** It was like a big moment because it was either going to go through to the next step or this was all going to end.

**JW:** It was the first, like, make it or break it moment.

**KF:** Mhmm.

**ME:** Right.

**JW:** Alright so I know we mentioned in the last podcast that you had talking points for Michelle, and you had mentioned another person you prepared talking points for- Jen Rexroad.

**KF:** Yes, Jen Rexroad. She's the Executive Director of the California Alliance of Caregivers and so she was going to speak on behalf of resource families.

**JW:** Okay.

**ME:** And we really wanted Keri and I both to have the opportunity to testify. That was a hard decision because, you know, we are both so invested in this process but in the end we kind of made the decision that that's how we'd divide it up.

**KF:** It was bets for our bill to do it that way.

**JW:** Yeah. And I think that's actually a pretty smart move. I think one of the toughest things, one of the toughest decision make when you are lobbying a bill is finding, is deciding that you're not the right messenger on something and finding someone else who can speak to it better, so I think while that a really tough call, it's also a really smart call to go with.

**ME:** It was strategic for sure. It was strategic and I had the background in foster care that I could bring in when testifying as well and so, it went well.

**JW:** And so. Yeah. And so your written testimony went over fairly well.

**ME:** I felt like it. I was so completely nervous and, and tried to, you know, make as much eye contact as I could and had practiced my two minutes so many times.

**JW:** Yeah.

**ME:** And I just wasn't sure if I'd get questions or interrupted but, one of my favorite things about having the experience doing that is, you know, you're sitting in front of the committee members and sitting next to Assembly Member Maienschein and the other ones were on the stand and they really were paying attention. They were- seemed to really genuinely list- to be listening to what I had to say. They were making eye contact, they were nodding as I was talking, like, I felt like they were with me and feeling the message and, and to me it was validating because I felt like "Okay, I'm not making a complete fool out of myself, I'm making sense hopefully."

But it was really heartening to see how engaged they were. You know, as an outsider of the political process, you hear so many comments that people seem to have about our public officials and what their motives might be for being there but my experience I can say, just in that little small microcosm of a moment, that they really seemed to care. They were really listening and genuinely seemed to be engaged in what was happening.

**KF:** And we were one of the last bills to be heard that day and so we had seen multiple groups go up and those committee members, they asked questions or made comments that did show that they really cared about the issues that were being presented.

**JW:** Did you get, did you get any particular questions that were particularly tough from the committee members or anything you weren't prepared for or did you feel like you had a pretty good grasp of everything they threw at you?

**ME:** You know what? I didn't end up getting asked any questions. Our group didn't and I'm not sure why other than, I think, we had done so much prep work ahead of time and the testimonies were very calculated, like each, you know, there were three testimonies- Assembly Member Maienschein, myself, and Jen Rexroad- I don't know, I don't want to toot our own horn, just we had the most amazing preparation but you know, I guess we could go there.

**KF:** We did meet with staffers from their offices who asked us questions that the members had, so I think that was targeted already.

**JW:** You kind of already had that insight and awareness -

**KF:** Right, any questions that they had, they had given to their staffers and we answered them.

**ME:** Yeah we had kind of done it already ahead of time.

**JW:** I feel like most of the work for committee hearings really is done before the hearing day and at that point it's like that last formality with the vote at the tail end of it.

**KF:** Mhmm.

**ME:** Right, as Rex had told us, he's like 'just don't mess it up. Your job right now, going into the hearing is, you should be good, just don't mess it up and if nothing else put a face to what was happening in the bill where we had not met those Assembly Members in person before' and you know we got to have a little face to face time with them. That hopefully will be to our advantage in the future, too.

**JW:** Yeah, so I guess that leads to, I know we were kind of talking about how everything went on the general feel. How'd the vote go?

**KF:** It was unanimous. All seven of them voted 'Aye'-

**JW:** That's great!

**KF:** -to pass our bill out of committee and onto Appropriations.

**ME:** And we were sitting on the edge of our seats, like I was so nervous even still feeling confident about it, we were waiting for each of those Aye votes and there was a little bit of chatter going on around me, and I like, was trying to tune it because I just wanted to hear that the votes were. I wasn't 100% sure.

**JW:** I know, but I can understand even though, no matter how good you feel about how everything has gone, it's still that life or death moment and no matter what that is nerve-wracking.

**ME:** And really, we just, we worked on this so, I mean I just, being, we couldn't calculate the number of hours that we have spent since August and literally those two weeks leading up to the hearing, I mean, hundreds of hours just within those-

**KF:** Yeah. Final research to make sure that

**ME:** -couple of weeks.

**KF:** Everything was covered.

**ME:** Right so it was a do or die moment for sure, for us, it was dramatic I mean.

**JW:** So you said the next, next stop is Appropriations. Do you have a timeline, or hearing date for when you're up in Approps?

**KF:** Potentially. We met with their policy consultant and she said she would like for it to be April 4th but as of yesterday, it hasn't officially been posted on their hearing schedule.

**JW:** Okay.

**ME:** So tentatively, we're set and we're really hopeful for that date. We already know that this will most likely go on suspense, but once we-

**KF:** There will be no testimony.

**ME:** So once we go through that hearing, we'll be able to just start working with Jennifer Swenson on its next phase.

**KF:** She's the policy consultant for appropriations.

**JW:** Alright. Well, we'll check back in once you get through that next step there and, and start looking into how the next phase is going. But thanks for taking the time to give us an update.

**ME:** Thank you.

**KF:** Thank you.

**ME:** It was an exciting one.