

Jon Wainwright: Hi, this is Jon Wainwright and welcome back to The Clinic. We're back here with Keri and Michelle post-policy committee and going into Appropriations, correct?

Keri Firth: Yes.

Michelle Evans: That's correct!

JW: So what's that process been like? Getting ready for appropriations.

KF: Well getting ready for Appropriations, since our bill was passed out of the policy committee, you're told our bill would go to Appropriations and it would be placed on suspense.

JW: That's normally, kind of a death bill, isn't it?

KF: Not necessarily because of our high priority with our author's office and he's given a certain number of bills to take out of suspense, then, there's possibility we could come out of suspense.

ME: And actually most bills go on suspense. Pretty much if your bill has a price tag that looks like it will be more than \$150,000, it automatically goes to suspense so pretty much most bills go there and then they are all looked at more closely, amended, and heard at the same time. So we thought it was a death sentence but after meeting with our consultant on the Appropriations Committee, Jennifer Swenson, she walked us through the process and we left feeling, at least more hopeful...

KF: ...that it was not a death sentence

ME: It is not necessarily a death sentence just because it is going on suspense.

JW: So if 150,000 is that limit for what automatically lands you on suspense, what are you thinking your bills is going to cost?

ME: We just costed it out recently, narrowing things down a little bit to limiting the pilot participation to 3-5 counties and running the numbers...

KF: Yeah the total will be 4.75 million dollars.

ME: That's a pretty generous estimate. We feel like it might be able to be done for less than that but we wanted to error more on the side of caution.

KF: And that's providing for all 5 counties, so if we say 3-5 counties, if we don't get a total of 5, the cost will go down.

ME: And that will be for 20 case workers who have been trained to be coaches, that could be distributed amongst the 3-5 counties over a two year period participation in the pilot, also include money for a follow up study so a report can be sent to the legislature, so actually, we feel like it's a good deal. I mean in my world, \$4.75 million is a lot of money but it feels like anything under 5 million is a little more workable.

JW: Yeah.

KF: And the State Legislature, they don't necessarily flinch for budget asks under \$5 million.

JW: I was going to say the same thing. In the grand scheme of things, that's, 4.75 is a drop in the bucket compared to

KF: Yes.

JW: How much it costs to run...

KF: yes, we were told by several people if we could keep it under \$5 million, we would have better luck with it.

JW: Okay, so. Let's talk about going to appropriations, and you're told you're going to suspense. So, do you prepare at all for testimony when you're told up front, 'oh this is going to suspense file'?

KF: Well, we asked the staffer in our author's office about that because even if a bill is going to suspense, sometimes an author will still present, but our author, Assemblyman Maienschein, he typically does not present for bills that are going to the suspense file so we were told that we did not need to prepare anything, that we would not be presenting.

ME: And generally in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, most people don't testify. Like, if they know they are going to suspense, it's kind of more of a formality.

JW: Okay.

ME: But generally, there's not very much testimony there. So, the day before our Appropriations Committee when we thought we were not testifying, we had been on the Capitol, we've met with Carli our legislative aid for Assemblyman Maienschein's office, we've been going to other meetings that day and around 2:30 in the afternoon, we get a text message saying 'Hey, Brian's going to testify and he would like you all to testify as well.' So this is 2:30 in the afternoon and the meeting is like 9:00am the next morning, and we want to be prepared for these things so we were nervous but excited and then like an hour later we got a text message saying 'never mind, he doesn't want to testify and so you all aren't going to testify.' So we're like 'okay' and then...

JW: Weight lifted.

ME: Yeah! Weight lifted, like mixed feelings right? Because it's exciting...

KF: We were excited to testify even though it was last minute. We were still excited to have the opportunity.

ME: Yeah it's a great opportunity, and then around 5:00 that day, we got another text message saying 'I'm so sorry, never mind, will you all testify?'

JW: So never mind the never mind.

ME: Never mind the never mind, 'he's going to testify and will you all testify as well?' And of course we said 'sure, we'll do it' but man, like.

KF: We haven't covered Appropriations testimony in the clinic yet.

JW: Okay.

KF: And so we were.... here we are the evening before the hearing at 9:00 am, just scrambling, trying to figure out what to say, what the proper testimony is, because we became experts on the policy aspect and we had been learning a lot about the fiscal part too, but most of our testimony for that was on the policy side.

JW: So how does testimony, and maybe this is skipping ahead to committee hearing, but how does testimony differ from the policy committee to appropriations?

ME: Well they want you to focus more on the fiscal aspect. We were getting, it's a little confusing though because everyone would tell us 'well they really want you to focus on

the fiscal aspect, this is not about policy this is about appropriations,' but then on the other hand, people would say but you do need to talk about policy...

KF: It provides a context.

ME: Because it provides context, and partly, in some ways you kind of, you need to sell the legislators on your idea and why this is important but you don't want to spend too much time on policy, you really need to focus on fiscal and if you talk policy you might get cut off, but you need to talk about policy and so we were like, 'so?'

JW: So it's like how do you hit that goldilocks balance of just right policy and fiscal impact?

ME: Yes! How do you know how to do that? What we're learning is each committee also is so different, like the personality of each committee is also very different so I think that's where people who get experience with these committees and their legislators probably have some advantage because they-

KF: They what they need to say, they know what the culture is of that committee, how's run, how it's organized, what the members-particularly the chair- like to hear when you're testifying.

ME: Right.

KF: But we were brand new, had no idea.

ME: So we just, you know, prepared the best we could. We know this stuff pretty well, inside and out it's just more 'how do we package this in under two minutes in order to meet the needs of these people that we've never met?' We've met their staff but we've never met them.

KF: And give them the fiscal information in addition to just the right amount of policy background.

ME: So yeah, we were pretty nervous preparing for that.

JW: Understandable.

ME: But excited too, I mean, it's such a great opportunity.

JW: So, how did it go?

ME: Well...

KF: We arrived, thankfully, Lexi Howard, who's an alum at McGeorge and the Clinic, she was there in the audience for a different bill. So she looked over our notes and gave us some feedback, just really quick a few minutes before the hearing, so that was very helpful. Then we were the second bill up so it all happened very fast. We went up there and Assemblymen Maienschein, he just introduced us, he didn't really give testimony about the bill, he left that up to us. Just introduced us and then Michelle got the opportunity to testify first.

ME: Right. So I got to testify first and was super nervous. This room is big. Like and there's big screens, your face is on the big screen, and their sitting almost - the legislators are sitting in stadium sitting. There's lots of hustle and bustle going on. I started-

KF: And we're just down at the bottom.

ME: Yeah, we're just down at the bottom. Assembly member Maienschein was standing next to us. That was so nice.

KF: Like a coliseum.

ME: Yeah, it's like being in a coliseum and I noticed as I started we had people's attention and it was nice that I could start out and kind of lay out credentials and background, but I noticed the moment I would look down at my notes, I would lose them. Like just the second I would look down, which I was so nervous and didn't feel as prepared as I would have liked to be, so I would look down at my notes every once in a while. And we had been warned that if we went too long or stayed on policy for too long, we would probably get cut off and that we would be, but normally be a message given at some point in this committee about sticking to the fiscal elements and, and I did that. I was getting close to my 2 minute mark then I got cut off saying, 'Hey we only give people 2 minutes.' And, I said 'sure,' and I you know just asked for their consideration of our bill in suspense and Keri went ahead did her thing and had no hitch at all, she did great.

KF: Well mine was much shorter and I was - mine was designed to tie everything together. The policy and the fiscal and ask for their, well they revoke consideration while our bill was on suspense, so mine was rather short.

ME: But overall, like, I feel like it went well and it was great. Lexi was there and-

KF: Professor Micheli was there and he gave us a thumbs up.

JW: That's always good.

KF: Yeah.

ME: Yeah. And apparently, he's like 'you know what, she hadn't, we hadn't, no one had been given the warning yet, so you were within, you know, within bounds' and he said, that, you know, according to him, he said that it went well.

JW: Well that's always a good sign. So, your bill is on suspense now, and you mentioned also that this is 4.75 is kind of the cost you're estimating for if all five counties opt-in.

ME: That's with doing some of the Amendments that we are looking at. The current language says that all counties could participate in this pilot but we really want to narrow it down to 3-5 counties because we feel like that's a more manageable number to do a real holistic study on how to implement this in the State of California before it would be rolled out on a wider spread basis.

JW: Got it.

KF: And the committee consultant is going to work with us while it's on suspense to make amendments to hopefully help it get out of suspense.

JW: Okay, so I guess, you got a 4.75 dollar bill. How are going to come up with the funding for this? And I feel like this is a pretty critical questions because the Governor's M.O. is 'if you don't have the money for you bill figured out in the budget process, that pretty much guarantees it a veto.'

KF: So we met with Alex Kahn who is the republican caucus consultant for human services issues and we were talking to him about our bill and appropriations and funding sources and he mentioned the possibility of doing a budget ask. You know, it would be separate from the bill, we can't mention the bill at all in the budget ask letter or conversations.

JW: That seems like a weird line to draw.

KF: Mhmm. It's been very tricky. So we approached Assembly Member Maienschein's office, Carly, the staffer we've been working with and asked her about what he might think of doing a budget ask for the 4.75 million dollars, to request that from the general fund so that we automatically have the funding for our bill. And Maienschein was supportive; he was on board so we drafted a letter.

ME: Like that day, like we, the turnaround on this was so fast that we decided 'okay well, we've never written a letter like this before. We had one example to look at of someone else who had written a budget request letter and-

JW: How long of a letter? Is it just like a one-pager or?

ME: It's a one-pager that-

KF: A page and a half

ME: Yeah, it's about a page and a half that outlines, and that's with all of the address at the beginning-

JW: Oh yeah, and the CCs at the bottom.

ME: Yeah and the CCs at the bottom.

KF: The body of the letter is probably a page.

ME: Right and so it outlines briefly the policy, the amount of money that we're asking for and the-

KF: the breakdown

ME: The breakdown of what, how much money goes to-

KF: And Michelle did a lot of research on that. On coming up with the breakdown and exactly how much money this program would require and so we put that in the letter.

ME: So we just wrote a letter asking the Assembly and the Senate for 4.75 million dollars to pay for this pilot and felt like, pretty good about it, actually the way it turned out.

JW: Okay.

ME: It went well and Assembly Member Maienschein liked it and they distributed the letter to the Assembly Budget Committee as well as the Senate Budget Committee.

KF: And we instantly had double the workload because now we are on the track with our bill in meeting with people about our bill and the budget requests separately and meeting with people for that.

JW: And on that, I just want to be clear. On that you can't mention your bill.

KF: Mhmm.

JW: But in your budget ask, you basically say 'we need 4.75 million dollars for...' and then you just outline the contents of your bill?

KF: So we're using the same fact sheet, that we used for our bill with, we're using that for our budget proposal and we just replaced AB 1784 with, Budget Proposal for Resource Family Pilot Program and we also wrote a policy analysis for our bill and Dr. Pan's committee consultant for the Senate Sub 3 Budget Committee, she wanted some sort of research from us so we did our policy proposal, just went through the whole document and replaced AB 1784 this budget proposal.

ME: And I think it's pretty well known that often, you know, with the budget request that there is a parallel process happening of the bill. It's just, you don't mention-

KF: You're not supposed to talk about it.

ME: The bill in the budget requests.

JW: Gotcha. From an outsider perspective, that seems strange, but I can also see where maybe the reason you have it is that if you're supposed to be talking about a funding mechanism of a bill, I don't know. It doesn't-

KF: It's a policy

JW: It doesn't make a ton of sense on the outside.

ME: It's just two separate processes, really. I mean, you can go and ask that this be included in the Governor's budget for the coming year. Which is great, it's a little bit

shorter and simpler of a process actually than the bill process. I guess we'll just see how it goes, we really, I feel a lot of moments, especially in the last week, officially I'm like, okay, officially we're in a little over our head.

KF: Because last week, both last week and this week, we've been meeting with staffers from the offices of the members of the Assembly Sub 1 Budget Committee and the Senate Sub 3 Budget Committee. We also found out, yesterday and today we found out we are on the agenda for both of the committees this week, so this -

ME: Yeah, so committees happen this week

KF: Wednesday and Thursday.

ME: So we submitted the letter last week and this week we're testifying in both committees.

JW: And they say government drags its feet on things and takes time, and here it is, you're just like *snap*, just like that, right away.

KF: We can't keep up with the speed of government.

All laugh

ME: It has gone really fast for us. It's exciting though, I mean, it is just never a dull moment.

JW: Alright we'll, we'll have to pick it up with the next not-dull moment. But in the meantime, thanks for taking the time.

KF: Thank you.

ME: Thank you so much.