Advocacy through a Legislative Lens

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of the study, Advocacy through a Legislative Lens, was the first hand observation of the practical application of the legislative process from an advocacy standpoint. This involved a case study analyzing the interplay between identified stakeholders non-profits, business, government, and community and the impact said interplay would have on the Healthy Choices for Healthy Children Legislation (SB210/HB373). Methods used in this study included research conducted through first hand participation and observation in meetings with identified aforementioned key stakeholders specifically through coalition calls, committee hearings, interested party meetings, and individual lobbying efforts. Findings of the study were the identification of the primary driver of each aforementioned stakeholder to participate in advocacy, the effect each stakeholder can have on the movement of legislation, and where the social work perspective can be utilized in the legislative process. Conclusions and general implications of this study were advocacy by various stakeholders are motivated by varying, multifaceted, and often understated factors that can impact the interplay between them. In this case study the effect of the interplay resulted in the delay in anticipated movement of the bill in the Ohio legislature and highlighted a need for advocates with a social work perspective in the legislative process.

THE LEGISLATION
Ohio Senate Bill 210 and House Bill 373 – the Healthy Choices for Healthy Children legislation, is a three-pronged approach to fighting childhood obesity in a setting where it can have an immediate impact – Ohio schools.

Nutrition
Physical Education
BMI Reporting

METHOD
Direct observation completed to analyze the interplay of those involved in the passage of legislation from its inception is done by answering the following questions:

Who are the key stakeholders What are the drivers for all involved?
• Business: Key Driver = Cost
• Non-Profit: Key Driver = Advocacy/Mission Advancement Opportunity
• Government: Key Driver = Votes/Community Support
• Community: Key Driver = Ability To Support Changes
• Corporate Social Responsibility
• Prior relationship/interaction of stakeholders
• Personal feelings/experience regarding issue
• Cultural implications

How do they interact?
• The advancement of individual drivers along with the existence of universal drivers meant each stakeholder could benefit by creating limited time collaborative effort formed with the intention of working for the passing of the legislative solution. Thus the Healthy Choices for Healthy Children Coalition was formed.

THE INTERPLAY
Though anticipated to be an easy win, the coalition encountered Pushback!

Business: Change Products, Fines on them?
Risk to Driver: Cost
Non-Profit: Can you remain a neutral advocate?
Risk to Driver: Mission Advancement
Government: Negative reaction from the community/constituents?
Risk to Driver: Votes/Support
Community: Cannot meet changes financially or culturally?
Risk to Driver: Willingness and ability to meet change

Advocacy is not done in a vacuum. Issues between coalition members arose:
• Cooperate Social Responsibility (CSR) vs. Cost
New products ex. Vitamin Water & M&M’s Cookies MAX developed to offset revenue cost of lost revenue from less nutritious products, which would be banned with the passage of the legislation
• Business Round Table (BRT) vs. Republican Senate
BRT supported Governor Strickland’s education plan, atypical of them, Wounded relationship with Republican party has not yet mended
• Legislators/Community personally tied to obesity
Issues of Cultural Sensitivity in the community

CONCLUSIONS
Advocacy through a legislative lens in this case study could be beneficial from the field of social work through:
Knowledge of social welfare policy being applied to create legislation packaged in a way that makes the most effective societal impact.
A social work perspective and knowledge of systems theory could used to identify issues and points of dysfunction among stakeholders to more efficiently and effectively navigate the interplay.

This case study highlighted questions pertaining to obesity and the social responsibility a social worker has to advocate for its prevention, such as:
Per the Code of Ethics, we must protect the value or “dignity and worth” of our clients. Is this legislation…
Encouraging the stigmatization of the overweight?

The Hot Issue: Do you think the state should regulate the types of food offered in school vending machines and lunch halls?

57% Yes 43% No

Comments:
• No Let people eat what they want, always trying to run people’s lives!
• Yes The problem is that local districts can’t regulate this issue because they are too dependent on the revenue, regulation is needed.

No it should be the responsibility of the Federal Vending Machine Czar. The states should only collect taxes on what’s approved to be in the machine.

REFERENCES
The Columbus Dispatch.