Reflections on Policy & Advocacy
Balancing the Pragmatic with the Prophetic
Voinovich School Public Service Perspectives – April 19, 2024
OU Was My Foundation

• My career aspiration when I was an undergrad at Ohio University was to work for Planned Parenthood.
• Started as a journalism major but quickly made my way to my real love which was political science/campaigns & elections.
• Fall quarter of my sophomore year I worked fulltime on a State Rep. campaign in my hometown.
• Did multiple independent studies and internships (political activity)
• United Campus Ministry, Gay People’s Alliance, Baker Student Center, and Bentley Hall were the center of my college life.
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• First job with Planned Parenthood of Southeast Ohio; worked in reproductive health care for the next 15 years;
• Went from “fundraiser” to a “development director” to public affairs director;
• Four of my first five bosses were woman; very atypical;
• My employers invested a lot in training; particularly political and fundraising training;
• It was intensely personal and isolating; work life balance was hard.
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• In 1996, I joined Center for Families and Children as their Director of Government Relations; this marked my first real engagement with broader state policy making;

• George Voinovich was Governor, worked on my first state budget, engaged in state coalition work, developed key relationships;

• Worked on issues related to behavioral health, early learning, HIV, and poverty; led successful grassroots lobbying effort to secure $7 million in first time state funding for an Ohio HIV Drug Assistance Program.

• Managed my first winning Cuyahoga County levy campaign.
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• 1999, join the Federation for Community Planning as Senior Fellow and Director of Public Policy;

• Built an eight-member multi-disciplinary policy and advocacy team; tax policy, Medicaid, early learning, and federal budget policy – raised $1 mil. annually;

• Took over leadership of Have a Heart Ohio and managed statewide campaign to defeat a potential constitutional amendment;

• Fellowship in DC offices of then Cong. Sherrod Brown;

• Unofficial advisor to gubernatorial candidate Ted Strickland.
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• Appointed Ohio Medicaid Director, December 2007; began the month the Great Recession began – this would shape my entire tenure.

• State government control split between Republicans and Democrats;

• Implemented one Medicaid budget and helped pass a Medicaid budget through the Ohio General Assembly.

• Controlling costs was major focus area.
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• Joined MetroHealth in February 2010;
• Developed support for a 1115 Medicaid demonstration waiver resulting in nearly 30K+ uninsured low-income residents obtaining Medicaid coverage;
• Worked with local/state government to secure a state funding and a piece of state property for site of new hospital;
• Prior to Supreme Court decision, worked with MetroHealth’s legal department and county prosecutor to make it clear that MetroHealth had legal authority to offer same-sex domestic partner benefits to its employees;
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• Rejoined Community Solutions as CEO in 2015;
• Rebuilt and diversified organization; made big investments in Medicaid policy;
• We led several important successful policy efforts across both Trump and Biden administrations and Kasich and DeWine administrations to secure improvements in health and human service programs.
• Built a board of directors that was more racially and politically diverse.
Balancing the Pragmatic with the Prophetic

• Data: Understand local, regional, state and national data.

• Collaboration: Don’t go alone, partners make change longer lasting.

• Community: Community voice is essential to good policy.

• Diversity: Your team/organization should be as diverse as your community (politically diverse as well)

• Expertise: Recruit team and partners based on knowledge and relationships

• Pragmatism: Develop practical solutions that are both bold and sustainable.