



A Balancing Act: Budget Cuts, Public Policy, and Social Services Law

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Budget cuts are forcing us to evaluate what we do and how we do it. Our options are not always ideal, obviously. How can we move ahead with our strategic priorities that require funding and continue providing core programs and services? This is a major challenge, and meeting that challenge requires greater creativity and flexibility on our part. Let me give you an example.

The Challenge. One of our highest strategic priorities is the creation of the Applied Public Policy Assistance Network (APPAN), which means helping policymakers gain access to information that leads to more informed and better decisions. The implementation committee for APPAN recommended a structure that includes a faculty director and the gradual creation of a small professional staff. Aimee Wall was willing to transition away from her work in public health law and take on the faculty leadership role for APPAN. This move allowed us to begin a new initiative in tough financial times by shifting existing resources. Aimee has been working quietly in her new role, mostly by serving as liaison between the School and policymakers in Raleigh.

In the meantime, John Saxon retired and created a vacancy in the field of social services law.



Given the prospect of large budget cuts on the horizon, the vacant position raised a serious question. Should we fill the social services law position, or should we eliminate the position and return the money to help meet our permanent budget cuts? Cutting the position would mean walking away from a core field important to many county and state officials, and at a time when demands on social services are greater than ever. The Dean's Advisory Council heard from Janet Mason and Cheryl Howell about the need for the position, but we did not reach any conclusion about whether it should be sacrificed to meet budget cuts.

Balancing Act. Here is how I have decided to balance our interests. This plan works only because Aimee Wall has a strong interest in social services law and is willing to do the following:

- Take over the social service law field, and work with Janet Mason and others to define the areas to be covered.
- Continue serving as policy liaison for the School (20-25% of her time). In addition to continuing to organize our program for new legislators, she will foster relationships between faculty and legislators, legislative staff, and other state-level policymakers.
- Work with Christine Wunsche and John Rubin on efforts to revise and update the *Daily Bulletin* and related products.
- Work with Ann Simpson to identify funding opportunities for APPAN. If we identify funding (internally or externally) to implement the original plan, Aimee will serve as part-time faculty director and we will identify an EPA professional to manage the policy initiative.

What does all of this mean?

First, it means that we continue our important work in the social services law field, but we will do slightly less so that Aimee can continue serving as policy liaison for the School.

Second, we will not roll out APPAN as originally envisioned until we identify a source of funding to support it, but we will increase our work with policymakers. Money to support APPAN could come from a private foundation, or we might use some of our own one-time money to get it started for a period of years until it can become self supporting. We won't know about the availability of internal funding until the dust settles from the budget cuts.

Third, we have the option of using the state money that funded John Saxon's vacant position to meet a portion of our state budget cuts. It is too soon to know whether that will be necessary, but it looks more and more likely.

Aimee and I have come to believe that a more gradual rollout of our policy assistance work might be the best strategy in any event. She is doing a great job as our liaison in building relationships



with Governor Perdue's policy advisors, legislators, and members of the legislative staff. This week she organized a group of nine faculty members who traveled to Raleigh and met for a couple of hours with the team in charge of Governor Perdue's state government reorganization effort. We were there to react to draft proposals, but we also identified possible ways to help them with the implementation—which is the hardest and important part.

Aimee will shift to the social services law position in mid-April or early May, and she will continue identifying opportunities for the School to become more involved in policy issues. I believe that this is a good outcome that achieves our interests to the greatest extent possible. Many thanks to Aimee for her flexibility in working through our different options and arriving at a solution.