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**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Board of Advisors of the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Update on our work

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We believe our progress in advancing evidence-based reforms in social programs is accelerating, and includes an increasing number of key reforms actually enacted into law, as well as others nearing enactment. These reforms encompass both elements of our mission: (i) increased funding and support for rigorous - preferably randomized - evaluations, in order to build the body of research-proven social interventions; and (ii) meaningful incentives and support for recipients of federal funds to adopt such proven interventions, and put them into widespread use. What follows is a brief summary of recent developments. Please let me know if you have questions or would like additional information. Any advice you have would be much appreciated.

**1. The FY 08 Omnibus Appropriations Act just signed into law includes important new evidence-based reforms that the Coalition helped to develop and/or advance, as follows:**

- The creation of a new \$10 million evidence-based home visitation program at HHS, which is designed to provide seed money to scale up research-proven models such as the [Nurse Family Partnership](#). As you'll recall, we helped support the development of this program by OMB, and then worked with Senator Landrieu and Appropriations Committee staff to help gain funding and ensure a focus on research-proven models. Based on our input, the final Congressional language directs HHS to "ensure that States use the funds to support models that have been shown, in well-designed randomized controlled trials, to produce sizeable, sustained effects on important child outcomes such as abuse and neglect . . . [and] not to incorporate any additional initiatives that have not met these high evidentiary standards."
- A \$24 million increase over last year in the Institute of Education Sciences' (IES) Statewide Data Systems program to facilitate rigorous research in K-12 education. As you'll recall, the Coalition helped obtain initial funding for this program in FY 05 through our work with the Appropriations Committee. This program awards grants to states to collect longitudinal data on individual student achievement - data which greatly facilitate carrying out randomized controlled trials and other rigorous longitudinal studies.
- Strong support for evidence-based approaches at the Departments of Education, Labor, and HHS in the Committee report language, which is now part of the legislative history guiding the agencies. As you'll recall, based on our input, (i) both the House and Senate reports accompanying the Appropriations Act support IES as the lead agency for evaluations of federal education programs, and call for such evaluations to use "rigorous methodologies, particularly random assignment," and (ii) the Senate report urges the Labor Department, in its program to facilitate the re-entry of prisoners into the community, to focus funding on activities "shown in well-designed randomized controlled trials to have sizeable, sustained effects on important workforce and reintegration outcomes . . . ." The Senate report also urges the Secretary of HHS "to

work across the Department to direct its resources toward programs with the highest evidentiary standards, such as randomized trials . . . ."

- 2. The Second Chance Act - which per our input contains a 2% set-aside for rigorous evaluations of strategies to facilitate prisoner re-entry into the community - has moved closer to enactment.**

The House passed its version of the Act in November, containing a provision that we helped develop to set aside 2% of program funds for evaluations that "include, to the maximum extent feasible, random assignment and generate evidence on which reentry approaches and strategies are most effective" (H.R. 1593). In August, the Senate Judiciary Committee passed its version of the Act, containing the same provision (S. 1060).

- 3. The Gang Abatement and Prevention Act, passed by the Senate in September, includes key evidence-based provisions developed with the Coalition's input.**

Title IV of the bill (S. 456) establishes a National Commission whose mission includes reporting to Congress and the President on "top-tier" crime prevention and intervention strategies. Based on our input to Sen. Feingold's Judiciary Committee staff, the bill defines "top tier" as "any strategy supported by rigorous evidence of sizeable, sustained benefits to participants in the strategy or society," and it defines "rigorous evidence" as "evidence generated by scientifically valid forms of outcome evaluation, particularly randomized trials (where feasible)." The bill also authorizes a new program - to fund innovative delinquency prevention strategies - that includes a set-aside for evaluations meeting this standard of "rigorous evidence."

- 4. Building on the evidence-based home visitation program just enacted into law, we're urging national political leaders to invest \$3 billion in the few social interventions proven to produce sizable, sustained improvement in the lives of children and youth (click [here](#) for two-page proposal).**

As you know, rigorous research has identified a few interventions that are highly effective in preventing educational failure, substance abuse, crime, teen pregnancy, workforce failure, and other outcomes that damage millions of American lives each year. Our proposal seeks to put these interventions into widespread use, where they can - for the first time - successfully address such problems on a national scale. This proposal is patterned on the approach used in the newly-enacted evidence-based home visitation program (described in #1, above).

- 5. We've added the following intervention to our Social Programs That Work website: [Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Program](#) (to quickly move welfare recipients into the workforce). Randomized controlled trial shows sizable increase in employment rates and job earnings, reduction in welfare dependency, and savings to the government.**
- 6. New and continuing partners: the MacArthur Foundation, the William T. Grant Foundation, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and former Congressman Tom Downey.**

The MacArthur Foundation and Clark Foundation recently awarded us grants to focus public funds on research-proven social interventions. The William T. Grant Foundation recently awarded the Coalition a grant to provide workshops and in-depth consulting on evidence-based policy to key policymakers and researchers. Former Congressman Tom Downey is working with us on a pro bono basis to bring our ideas to the attention of Congressional policymakers.

I hope this update is helpful.