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1725 I Street NW, Suite 300 Washington, DC 20006 www.coalition4evidence.org August 28, 2014

MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Update – Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

We're pleased to report major new progress in our work and in evidence-based policy more broadly:

- 1. Our push for wider use of low-cost randomized controlled trials (RCTs) gained important momentum with a White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) conference on the topic on July 28, co-sponsored by our organization. The conference Demonstrating How Low-Cost Randomized Controlled Trials Can Drive Effective Social Spending highlighted examples of large, low-cost RCTs that have produced evidence of high policy importance, as well as studies recently launched through the Coalition's low-cost RCT competition. Participants including White House, OMB, federal agency, and philanthropic foundation officials; members of Congress and Congressional staff; leading researchers; and other stakeholders explored ways to advance greater use of such studies across government and philanthropic programs. For further information, see the White House OSTP summary and our brief meeting overview.
- 2. Bipartisan "Social Impact Bond" (SIB) legislation designed to scale up evidence-based social interventions has been introduced in the House and Senate, incorporating rigorous evidence standards that we helped develop. The legislation, introduced in the House by Reps. Todd Young (R-IN) and John Delaney (D-MD) and in the Senate by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT), seeks to advance broad federal use of SIBs an innovative private-public funding tool designed to focus funds on social interventions demonstrating important positive impacts. The legislation uses rigorous evidence of effectiveness to determine which social interventions are eligible for SIB funding; and requires rigorous, preferably randomized, evaluations to measure whether the SIB projects achieved their targeted impacts. We and other evidence-focused organizations have expressed strong support for this legislation.
- 3. The House Budget Committee majority staff, under Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI), has released a widely-publicized anti-poverty agenda that incorporates key evidence-based approaches we've put forward, in testimony before the Committee last year and other forums. The report is entitled Expanding Opportunity in America. Evidence-based proposals include: (i) the creation of a pilot "Opportunity Grants" program, under which states would have flexibility to use certain federal funds to implement innovative work-focused poverty-reduction programs, provided these innovations undergo rigorous evaluations to determine their effectiveness; and (ii) the establishment of a bipartisan Commission on Evidence-Based Policy Making to advance the use of government administrative data for research purposes, with appropriate privacy protections; and to explore "how best to incorporate outcomes"

measurement and institutionalize randomized controlled trials into [government] program design."

- 4. The Justice Department's National Institute of Justice has launched an RCT Challenge, designed to encourage criminal justice agencies to use low-cost RCTs as a "standard and straightforward approach to answering their questions and conducting their day-to-day business operations." The winner of the Challenge will be the first contestant to complete five RCTs successfully, and will receive a monetary prize. With this initiative, the National Institute of Justice joins the National Institute of Health (NIH) as two federal scientific agencies that are pioneering the use of low-cost RCTs as an important evidence-building tool. (NIH's low-cost RCT funding initiative, which we've reported on earlier, is linked-here.)
- 5. The Coalition's open online workshop in evidence-based policy has attracted strong usage, with viewers in 66 countries and 45 U.S. states since its launch in December 2012. Entitled How to Read Research Findings to Distinguish Evidence-Based Programs from Everything Else: User-Friendly Tools for Policy Officials and Stakeholders, the workshop consists of two brief video series (available here at no charge, 90 minutes total), followed by eight optional weekly conference calls providing hands-on experience reviewing actual studies (costing \$150 for all eight sessions). The next set of weekly conference calls will take place at noon EST on Thursdays, from September 25 through November 13. For groups of five or more, we can also schedule a separate set of sessions at a mutually-convenient time. If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact David Anderson (danderson@coalition4evidence.org, 202-239-1248).

We hope this update is helpful. Any thoughts or suggestions you have on our work would be much appreciated.

Jon

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