May 15, 2009

MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Update on our work

I'm pleased to report that the President's FY10 budget, released last week, includes a number of major evidence-based initiatives for which we've provided key input. Below is a brief summary for your review. Any thoughts or advice you have would be much appreciated.

1. **$124 million for a major new HHS evidence-based Home Visitation program for low-income mothers and pregnant women.**

    The program, which as you'll recall was first announced in the budget outline released in March, will primarily fund home visitation models that are proven effective in rigorous - presumably randomized - studies showing sizable effects on critical child and family outcomes. The budget cites the evidence supporting Nurse Home Visitation as an example. Some of the funds will also support models backed by promising evidence, along with rigorous random-assignment evaluations of these models to hopefully move them into the "proven" category. The budget envisions gradual growth in this program to $1.8 billion in FY 2019.

2. **$110 million for a new HHS evidence-based Teen Pregnancy Prevention program.**

    At least $75 million of these funds will support models that have been proven effective in randomized experiments. At least $25 million will support development and replication of promising models, along with rigorous evaluations to hopefully move them into the proven category.

3. **A $10 million increase in Department of Labor funding for rigorous, including randomized, evaluations for a new HHS evidence-based Teen Pregnancy Prevention program.**

    This will include a randomized evaluation of the promising YouthBuild program (a youth and community development program), as well as a new $5 million Department-level evaluation initiative which "recognizes the need to conduct rigorous evaluations, including random assignment studies, to determine which programs and interventions work and inform [DOL's] policy, management, and resource allocation decisions."

4. **A $57 million increase in Institute of Education Sciences' (IES) funding for rigorous education research and dissemination for a new HHS evidence-based Teen Pregnancy Prevention program.**

    As you know, since IES was established within the Department of Education in 2002, it has been a leader in funding rigorous research and evaluation using scientifically-valid methods. This proposed budget increase (34% over last year) represents a strong Administration endorsement of IES's central research role.

5. **Strengthened focus on rigorous evaluations at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which funds service programs such as Americorps.**

   CNCS's budget includes a $2.1 million increase (to $6 million) in funding for evaluation. A key focus is to "conduct high-quality, rigorous social science evaluations ... using experimental designs, such as random assignment ... to identify the extent to which changes in participants' civic and academic attitudes, behaviors, and skills are the result of participation in national and community service programs."

   We believe these developments represent a remarkable step forward to evidence-based government. As you know, many existing federal social programs, when properly evaluated, are found to produce weak or no effects - even programs that appeared promising in less-rigorous studies. The President's budget - by investing strategically in (i) rigorous evaluations aimed at growing the number of proven-effective models, and (ii) scale-up of the proven models - could begin transforming government social programs into truly effective vehicles for improving people's lives and society's well-being. Much, of course, will depend on Congressional action on these budget proposals, and on agency implementation. We will continue to provide input and assistance to policy officials/staff as the process goes forward, and will keep you posted.