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MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Advisors of the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy
(distribution list below)

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Update - Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

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

1. **The [2014 Economic Report of the President](#) contains an exceptionally strong endorsement of rigorous – particularly randomized – evaluations as a key to improving federal programs, devoting an entire chapter to the subject for the first time** (chapter 7, pp. 269-298). Prepared by the President's Council of Economic Advisers, the March 2014 report underscores the extent to which evidence-based policy is a priority of the Administration, providing a clear and persuasive discussion of the value of randomized evaluations and an overview of the Administration's many evidence-based reform initiatives. The report prominently cites the Coalition's work – e.g., as a source of authority on evidence standards and on the feasibility of conducting low-cost randomized controlled trials using administrative data.

In addition, the President's FY 2015 budget request, released in March, contains an excellent, more detailed summary of the Administration's key evidence-based initiatives, both ongoing and proposed ([linked here](#), see pages pp. 65-70).

2. **Congress takes concrete, bipartisan steps toward reauthorization of HHS's \$400 million/year evidence-based early childhood home visiting [program](#), which we played a key role in initiating in 2007-2010. These steps include:**
 - **Bipartisan Congressional enactment of a *short-term* reauthorization of the program through March 2015**, as part of a larger bill signed into law in early April. This action provides a temporary extension of the program pending Congressional deliberation on a longer-term reauthorization.
 - **An April 2 reauthorization [hearing](#) in the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, at which Subcommittee members expressed clear bipartisan support for long-term reauthorization, and at which we testified.** The Coalition testified alongside two home visiting program models identified by the Coalition's Top Tier evidence initiative as backed by rigorous evidence of effectiveness – the [Nurse-Family Partnership](#) and [Child FIRST](#) – and a researcher from RAND. [Our testimony](#) strongly recommended reauthorization of this program as one of the few federal social spending programs that uses scientific evidence of effectiveness as a main

factor in determining which activities to fund. We also recommended modest legislative revisions to close a loophole in the program's evidence standard that has allowed a number of unproven and/or ineffective program models to qualify as "evidence based" (see pages 4-5 of our testimony, and our follow-up [correspondence](#) with the Subcommittee Chairman).

- 3. Congress has enacted an important new evidence-based initiative in the Food Stamps program: \$200 million to fund, and rigorously evaluate, state pilot projects that provide employment and training services to program participants.** Based on a concept originally proposed by House Republicans, this initiative seeks to increase the workforce participation of Food Stamps participants and reduce their reliance on public assistance. Importantly, the legislation requires a rigorous impact evaluation of each pilot project to determine its effect on participants' employment, income, economic well-being, and use of public assistance. Similar demonstration-evaluations in welfare policy in the 1980s and 1990s successfully identified a set of program strategies that increased participants' economic well-being while reducing government spending, and had a major impact on federal and state welfare policy.

Drawing on this effort as a key precedent, we have proposed a broader initiative to incorporate evidence-based approaches into major federal entitlement programs, as part of our recent [input](#) to Congress.

- 4. Evidence-based policy, including the Coalition's work, has received excellent coverage in recent press articles, including:**
 - **David Bornstein's April 16 piece in the [New York Times](#) – "Can Government Play Moneyball?"** – which discusses the Obama Administration's evidence-based policy initiatives and includes key quotes from Coalition Board members Robert Shea and Ron Haskins – both Republicans – as underscoring the potential of evidence-based policy to unite Democrats and Republicans around the shared goal of more effective government. In addition to citing our work (e.g., low-cost RCT competition, evidence reviews), the piece highlights efforts by our colleagues at [Results for America](#) to build a broader, organized constituency for a "moneyball" approach to government, and discusses work by our colleague Daniel Stid at the Hewlett Foundation on the political challenges in using rigorous evidence to allocate social spending.
 - **Dan Gorenstein's April 24 piece in [Marketplace](#) (the most popular business program in U.S. radio) – "Using data to treat the sickest and most expensive patients."** The piece highlights the work of Dr. Jeffrey Brenner – a MacArthur "genius grant" winner who has developed an innovative healthcare delivery intervention for patients with multiple chronic conditions – and his plan to conduct a randomized controlled trial to determine if the intervention really produces the hoped-for improvements in patient health and sizable reductions in health spending. The piece cites our work on the critical need for randomized trials in health care delivery, and the current paucity of rigorous evidence about what works in this area. Our colleague Amy Finkelstein at [JPAL-North America](#), who is also quoted in piece, is the lead investigator in the trial of Brenner's intervention.

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

Jon

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