

July 26, 2019

Subject: Recommendation for Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriation to Support Effective Implementation of New Chief Data Officers, Evaluation Officers, and Statistical Officials

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger:

The Data Coalition is a strong supporter of effective implementation of a monumental new law called the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-435), which includes the OPEN Government Data Act and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act. Congress passed this authorizing legislation late last year with overwhelming bipartisan support, including your support.

The Evidence Act was designed to improve access to government data while simultaneously strengthening privacy protections. When taken together, the three core titles of the Evidence Act present a framework to revolutionize the value of government data for policymakers and the American public. But fulfilling the goals of the legislation and the vision outlined unanimously by the U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking – which made the recommendations that formulated much of the legislation – cannot be achieved without sufficient resources in Executive Branch agencies. Today the single greatest risk for achieving this vision is the lack of funding and personnel to drive needed change within agencies.

The risks have become abundantly clear only in the last several weeks based on discussions with agencies and in reviewing initial guidance to federal agencies. On July 10, 2019, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued the first phase of implementation guidance to agencies, just three days before the enactment date of the Evidence Act.¹ The OMB guidance affirms a perspective outlined by the Evidence Commission and articulated in the Evidence Act: ensuring senior leaders are in place to execute the law is essential. The Evidence Act creates roles for new chief data officers, evaluation officers, and statistical officials across the federal government. If Congress wants agencies to succeed in becoming more evidence-based, and also providing Congress the evidence it needs to inform decisions, agencies must be appropriately resourced.

The Data Coalition’s prior written testimony, provided in May 2019 to the Senate Appropriations Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee entitled “Strengthening Federal Data Policies for Better Decision Making,” summarizes why this is so important.²

To address the emerging near-term need and minimize the risks for implementing the Evidence Act effectively, we urge the Committee to work with the Office of Management and Budget to provide government-wide funding support to support the implementation of these critical

¹ Vought, Russ. Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance. M-19-23. Washington, D.C.: White House Office of Management and Budget, 2019. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/M-19-23.pdf>

² Hart, Nick. Hoehner, Christian. Strengthening Federal Data Policies for Better Decision Making. Senate Appropriations Committee Outside Written Testimony. Data Coalition. 2019. Available at: https://www.datacoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SAC-FSGG.OWT_.DataCoalition.2019-05-24.pdf

reforms. We have provided the Committee two specific suggestions about how to accomplish this in a manner that builds on existing appropriations work and harmonizes with OMB's new implementation guidance.

Because agencies have not yet completed resource assessments, as required by the Evidence Act, we do not have a full accounting of the financial need across government for implementing this new law or the key provisions. But we do know that the Congressional Budget Office scored the legislation with a \$14 million cost in fiscal year 2020, with additional costs in subsequent years. The score also assumed that only the 24 agencies listed under the Chief Financial Officers Act would need to implement the provisions, though the Evidence Act and OMB's guidance establish more expansive expectations, particularly around the role of chief data officers.

In short, additional resources are critically needed by agencies to fulfill the intent of the Evidence Act, the vision of the Evidence Commission, and to succeed in making government data accessible, high-quality, and useful. Successful implementation of the Evidence Act will have a substantial return on investment for policymakers and the American public.

While we recognize you have difficult choices to make for the fiscal year 2020 discretionary budget, the Data Coalition strongly urges Congress to make a small investment in these important leadership roles. Thank you for your consideration. I would be pleased to discuss the request further with you or your staff at any time.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nick Hart".

Nick Hart, Ph.D.
CEO
Data Coalition