

March 13, 2020

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 APPROPRIATIONS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF FOUNDATIONS FOR EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING ACT OF 2018 AND OTHER DATA PRIORITIES IN GOVERNMENT

Dear Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, and Members of the Committee --

On behalf of the members of the Data Coalition, I write to strongly encourage Congress to prioritize resources for effective implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-435) in the FY 2021 appropriations.

Congress passed the Evidence Act in late 2018 with overwhelming bipartisan support. The Evidence Act was designed to enhance government's capabilities to improve data quality, access and usability -- each tenets of the policies advocated for by the Data Coalition. Over the past year, since enactment of the Evidence Act, agencies initiated productive steps to implement the new law's requirements, adhering to guidance from the Office of Management and Budget and beginning to develop the organizational infrastructure for successful implementation. But there is a great deal of work to be done to fully realize COngress' vision in the Evidence Act. Transforming government data into a strategic asset that can be used to support decision-making, in both government and the private sector, requires our full attention and prioritization of this important new law.

The Data Coalition offers the following requests related to implementation of the Evidence Act:

- **Targeted resources for the 24 Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act agencies** to support Chief Data Officers, Evaluation Officers and Statistical Officials. The Data Coalition recommends at least \$2 million in each of the CFO Act agencies to specifically encourage development of leadership and expertise for these newly appointed officials under the Evidence Act. Several agencies requested additional resources for this purpose and the Data Coalition strongly supports those additional recommendations from agencies in FY 2021. A full set of recommendations by agency is included as an attachment to this letter.
- **Interagency transfer fund to allocate additional resources to leading agencies** of up to \$50 million. Some CFO Act agencies may require additional resources to launch pilot projects or support government-wide coordination of certain aspects of data governance, management, and analysis capabilities. An interagency transfer fund supports this purpose while also allowing for flexibility to provide additional resources to the Chief Data Officers required for non-CFO Act agencies. In addition, these resources could be used to support development of interagency resources for implementing data governance and management activities, as well as developing demonstration projects for privacy-preserving technologies and artificial intelligence applications.

- **Administrative provision for flexibility in establishing Evidence Incentive Funds** in each agency and to encourage set-asides of up to 1 percent in program management resources for supporting new data management and analytics activities, including program evaluation.
- **Resources at the Government Services Administration to support interagency coordination of open data and the Chief Data Officers Council.** A total of \$5 million was incorporated in the GSA budget in FY 2020 to support aspects of the OPEN Government Data Act. The Data Coalition requests Congress continue this allocation and also provide at least \$2 million to support the Chief Data Officers Council which met for the first time in early 2020 to coordinate the more than 80 agency chief data officers now in place.

In addition to the activities agencies are undertaking specifically to implement the Evidence Act, additional activities are proposed across the FY 2021 Budget requests that lean in on implementation of bipartisan and unanimous recommendations from the U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking.

- **Developing a National Secure Data Service at the Department of Commerce** is an idea that was initially floated for the FY 2020 appropriations, and the Census Bureau and Bureau of Economic Analysis are already moving forward within existing resources. \$5 million allocated to the Undersecretary of Economic Affairs for further development of this cutting-edge and much-needed shared service resource for government agencies will support advancement of privacy technologies and responsible data sharing capabilities that benefit decision-makers.
- **Enabling data sharing for income and earnings information through the National Directory of New Hires** has been floated for years by administration's of both political parties. The FY 2021 Budget request includes general provisions to finally enable this access for limited purposes that enable higher-quality research and the use of data for improving federal programs. The Data Coalition encourages the appropriations committee to consider incorporating aspects of this language to advance these important capabilities.

While we recognize that you have difficult choices to make regarding the FY 2021 appropriations, successful implementation of the Evidence Act and support for stronger data capabilities across government will have a substantial return on investment for the American public. The Data Coalition strongly urges Congress to prioritize these crucial investments in open data and evidence-based policymaking, continuing the momentum that will make the data government collects increasingly accessible, high-quality, and useful for improving our society.

Thank you for your consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these requests with you or your staff in coming weeks.

Respectfully,



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