

December 4, 2014

The Honorable Senator Thomas Carper
United States Senate
Chairman, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Senator Tom Coburn
United States Senate
Ranking Minority Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Endorsement of S.2952, Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission Act of 2014

Dear Senators Carper and Coburn:

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) is pleased to endorse provisions of the proposed *Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission Act of 2014* that address steps to enhance the conduct and quality of evaluations of federal programs. In particular, AEA applauds your efforts to embed evaluation into program design and to ensure that data are available for evaluation of federal programs. The work of your proposed Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking will be transformative in facilitating high-quality program evaluations.

Program evaluation is essential because it contributes to assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, and organizations to improve their effectiveness. It provides a useful and important tool to address the need for credible information, well-grounded decision making, and governmental transparency. Evaluation uses systematic data collection and analysis to address questions about how well government programs and policies are working, whether they are achieving their objectives, and why they are, or are not, effective. It produces evidence that can be used to compare alternative programs, guide program development and decision making, and reveal effective practices. By its very nature, it supplies the publicly accessible information that is at the heart of transparency and open government.

At the same time, to make more effective use of available scientific evaluation methods, we believe that it is very important to amend Section 4.a.3 of this bill describing the duties of the Commission as follows: “make recommendations on how best to incorporate outcomes measurement, institutionalize randomized controlled trials where appropriate, embed rigorous impact analysis into program design, and more generally select and implement methods best suited for answering pressing questions about federal programs and policies.” Such language would allow for and promote use of a greater variety of methods that may be needed to evaluate federal programs, without overemphasizing a single method of impact analysis that may not be feasible or appropriate in all cases. Without the revised language, opportunities might be missed to employ alternative evaluation methods that would provide appropriate evaluation evidence to policy makers.



Along these lines, AEA has produced the attached document that more fully describes the many ways that evaluation can be adapted to various federal programs and agencies, namely, *An Evaluation Roadmap for a More Effective Government*. We hope you find it useful.

AEA is a professional association of evaluators devoted to the application and exploration of evaluation in all its forms. AEA has approximately 8,000 members representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia as well as over 60 foreign countries. The AEA stands ready at any time to assist the Committee regarding evaluation issues and technical topics. We were particularly pleased to see that expertise in program evaluation was listed under qualifications to consider for appointments to the proposed Commission.

More generally, AEA would be interested in contributing to the work of the proposed Commission, as well as the dissemination of its findings. For example, AEA could sponsor sessions at its national conferences or in other venues on evaluation in federal agencies. If we can be of assistance, or if you need more information about evaluation or our organization, please do not hesitate to call on us or to contact Dr. Cheryl Oros, our senior advisor for evaluation policy (EvaluationPolicy@eval.org; 202-367-1166).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beverly Parsons".

Beverly Parsons
President, American Evaluation Association

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stewart Donaldson".

Stewart Donaldson
President-elect, American Evaluation Association

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jody Fitzpatrick".

Jody Fitzpatrick
Past President, American Evaluation Association

cc: Senator Murray
attch: An Evaluation Roadmap for a Better Government