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June 2022 Spotlight on SRCD U.S. Federal Policy Fellow: Tanya Tavassolie, Ph.D.

Tanya Tavassolie is a SRCD Federal Congressional Policy Fellow who is placed in the Office of Senator Maggie Hassan.

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Ever since I first learned about the SRCD Policy Fellowship in graduate school, I have wanted to be a part of it. During graduate school, I was exposed to policy-relevant research quite a bit and several of our graduates completed the fellowship. I always thought this fellowship would be a great way to learn more about policy and how research is used to inform laws, regulations, and policies at the federal level.

During my last year of graduate school, when I was gearing up to apply for the fellowship, I found out I was pregnant and switched gears to opt for a post-doctoral experience instead. At the University of Maryland, I was program manager for a research-program-partnership (RPP) with Educare DC, a Head Start center in

Washington, DC serving families with children ages birth to five. While there, I translated research for practitioners, educators, and teachers and helped hone their data understanding skills. Importantly, I learned how federal early education policies played out on the ground and began to understand the challenges that programs face. Three years and two kids later, I was ready to apply for the SRCD fellowship. I applied for both the Executive Branch and Congressional fellowships and when asked which I preferred, I bravely said Congressional. I am so glad I did, because this experience has helped me learn the ins and outs of the congressional side of the policymaking process and will help inform my applied research skills moving forward.

During my fellowship year I have worked in Senator Maggie Hassan's (Democrat, New Hampshire) office. Senator Hassan serves on both the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions "HELP" Committee and the Finance Committee, which opened tremendous opportunities for me as a fellow. She is also a champion for family friendly policies and I was so honored to be offered a position in her office. I have worked collaboratively with the education and health policy teams to draft letters to the administration to seek information about federal programs and to request changes to improve policy implementation; introduce bipartisan legislation; draft materials for Senate Committee hearings; and develop policy recommendations for the Senator. I have been able to use what I learned during my time at Educare to inform my work in the Senator's office. Throughout my fellowship, I have worked on legislation to expand access to child care services, help families save for their children's future, and support innovation in educational assessments. I have learned valuable skills such as drafting clear and concise materials for public hearings, effectively developing policy ideas into legislation, and meaningfully working in a bipartisan manner to move legislation forward. I also established relationships with advocacy groups, think tanks, and policy research organizations at the national, state, and local levels to better understand how federal legislation can most effectively address the issues they are facing. My mentor has taught me so much about how bills are drafted and move through Congress, including how to navigate complex dynamics on the Hill and committee processes. I also now understand how to build coalitions of support which can allow important legislation to become law. I have thoroughly enjoyed my experience as a congressional fellow and I aim to utilize my new policy knowledge in future employment opportunities.

This fellowship has been a life-changing experience for me. Part of the experience of being a Congressional fellow is becoming fully integrated into the office's legislative team. This often means covering policy areas that you are not an expert in and learning how to quickly digest information and become as well versed as you can on a given topic. While challenging, this experience has given me immense gratitude for what our

elected officials are managing on a daily basis. The news never stops, and thus, the work of our elected officials must follow suit.

I am so grateful to SRCD for offering me this fellowship experience and to my host office for mentoring me and embracing me in their office.

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