NEWS | POSTED SEPTEMBER 1, 2022

# SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Professional Portfolio Abstracts: Tanya Tavassolie, Ph.D.

2021-2022 SRCD Federal Congressional Policy Fellow in the Office of Senator Maggie Hassan.


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**Introduction:** As a fellow in Senator Hassan's office, Tanya worked with the education and health teams. Her portfolio of work included advising on early childhood and K-12 policies, preparing potential questions for the Senator to ask during hearings, and working with advocacy and policy groups to draft legislation. During her fellowship she helped draft legislation that would increase access to college savings for low income families as well as legislation that would help states improve their data infrastructure to support integration across public assistance programs. During her year in the Senator's office she learned about the legislative process and enjoyed collaborating within and between offices to advance legislation that help children and families.

**Portfolio Entry 1: Improving Early Childhood Data Systems Bill**

**Project Overview:**

*Background:* The Improving Early Childhood Data Systems bill is cosponsored by Senators Hassan and Cornyn. This bill provides grants to states to improve the data systems that operate child care and related subsidy systems. The bill establishes grants that can be used for integrating various data systems, purchasing new equipment, and/or hiring new personnel. The idea for this bill came from research that shows that small-dollar grants that improve outdated computer systems provide substantial impact on streamlining services and increasing efficiency.

*Goal(s):* To provide grants to states to improve the data systems that operate child care and related subsidy systems.

**Contributions of Fellow:**

- Connected with researchers to understand their policy recommendations and their research study
- Consulted with early childhood research and policy organizations about the bill idea
- Worked with legislative council and congressional research service to construct bill idea
- Worked collaboratively with other senate offices to gain support for bill

**Activity Focus Keywords:** Bill Language; Translating Research into Policy
**Policy Area Keywords:** Child Care Subsidy; State Data Systems
**Knowledge & Skills Keywords:** Evidence-based policymaking at the federal level; Conducting research that's useful to policy and practice

**Portfolio Entry 2: Hearing Materials for HELP Hearing on Child Care and Preschool Costs**

**Project Overview:**

*Background:* On March 22, 2022 the Senator Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee conducted a hearing to bring in professionals to discuss the high cost of preschool and child care for working families. As a staff member of a Senator on the committee, it is our job to help prepare the Senator for the hearing.

*Goal(s):* To help prepare the Senator for a hearing.

**Contributions of Fellow:**

- Drafted materials for Senator to prepare for the hearing
- Drafted background information on the witnesses and the topics that will be discussed during the hearing to prepare Senator for hearing

**Activity Focus Keywords:** Written Memo and Hearing Preparation Materials
**Policy Area Keywords:** Child Care Subsidy; Cost of Care
**Knowledge & Skills Keywords:** Evidence-based policymaking at the federal level; Translating policy into plain language

**Portfolio Entry 3: Helping Parents Save For College Act**

**Project Overview:**

*Background:* The Helping Parents Save for College Bill provides low-and middle-income families with a tax credit for contributions made to a 529 education savings account by expanding the existing Saver's Credit. This credit would be worth up to 50% of 529 account contributions. Additionally, this bill allows 529 account plan beneficiaries to move excess funds into their Roth Individual Retirement Account, without penalty.

*Goal(s):* To provide low-and middle-income families with a tax credit for contributions made to a 529 education savings account by expanding the existing Saver's Credit.

**Contributions of Fellow:**

- Collaborated and communicated with national stakeholders to learn about these issues
- Pitched bill idea to office staff and worked collaboratively with several legislative assistants to pull bill text together
- Collaborated with other Senate offices to gain cosponsor support
- Collaboratively wrote a one-pager for press release

**Activity Focus Keywords:** Bill Language
**Policy Area Keywords:** Higher Education; Tax Law; Retirement Savings
**Knowledge & Skills Keywords:** Evidence-based policymaking at the federal level; Translating policy into plain language

**Portfolio Entry 4: Letter to the Office of Head Start Regarding Eligibility Expansion**

**Project Overview:**

*Background:* One of the issues Head Start centers are dealing with is eligibility determination. Our office collaborated with Head Start stakeholders to write a letter to the Office of Head Start in the Department of Health and Human Services to ask them to expand eligibility for Head Start. The letter asked the Department to expand eligibility to include families that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. After we sent the letter, the Department issued new guidance that updated eligibility to include families that receive SNAP. We were thrilled that they made the change and even more excited that additional families can access Head Start.

*Goal(s):* To write a letter to the Department to expand eligibility to include families that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

**Contributions of Fellow:**

- Initial conversations with Head Start stakeholders
- Conversations with Congressional Research Service to understand implications of expanding eligibility
- Drafted and edited letter collaboratively with office staff
- Collaborated with other Senate offices and internal office staff to get cosigners and support for the letter

**Activity Focus Keywords:** Letter to Executive Branch
**Policy Area Keywords:** Head Start; Eligibility
**Knowledge & Skills Keywords:** Evidence-based policymaking at the state level; Translating practice challenges for policy changes

learn more about Tanya's fellowship experience