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May 2015 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Amy Griffin, Ph.D.

2014-2015 Federal Congressional Policy Fellow

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As a newly minted PhD, the prospect of coming to the Hill, with the goal to bridge research and policy, was exciting and nerve-wracking. With my excitement and unknowns upon graduation and moving to a new city, I arrived in DC ready for my new post. I found a home in the office of Senator Al Franken (MN), an office that was familiar with utilizing research fellows and has a deep respect for evidence-based knowledge. This familiarity made my transition to a fellow easier, but I quickly realized how different the Hill is from academia.

I spent the first month acclimating - asking about all the DC acronyms and getting into a non-academic rhythm. Additionally, I was no longer in my area of expertise, child welfare. I chose to challenge myself and learn a new topical area, economics and labor, which would broaden my understanding of families' wellbeing from a more financial perspective. After years of studying youth in the foster care and juvenile delinquency systems, I saw many patterns emerge. One pattern in particular was the issue of poverty. I

decided that working on this portfolio would give me insight as to the economic influence on families. As a fellow, I cover issue areas including minimum wage, apprenticeship programs, labor relation issues, predatory lending, and tax issues. I have also been able to work on policies that directly impact children in working families, such as the child tax credit and paid family leave. In researching all of these policies, I have developed a deeper understanding of potential avenues we can use to help build the working class and families. It is my hope that these mechanisms can help to strengthen all families and the children within them.

I have found that the skills I have developed as a social worker and a researcher have aided me during this fellowship year. I consistently meet with constituents and advocacy groups who all come to the table with their own agendas. Listening to their concerns and goals is critical to working together and building partnerships. As a researcher, I am constantly digging into a variety of materials to fact check and develop ideas as potential legislation for the Senator.

This fellowship experience has provided me firsthand insight as to the political maneuvering of policy and how research is needed and used often. It has also allowed me to learn how to translate research and make it accessible for different audiences. This year has been an incredible learning process that I will take with me throughout my career.