



(Senator Clinton with New York grandparent Dorothy Jenkins)

Transcript of Senator Clinton's (NY) testimony at the GU Congressional Briefing on Policies Impacting Grandparent Caregivers and Children in Foster Care

Thank you all so much. I'm just thrilled that this had such a great turnout and so many people are here to support grandfamilies because we know how essential that is for wellbeing and taking care of our children, our parents, and our grandparents and having grandparents take care of children and it all works together....

I wanted to start by thanking [Senator Snowe] because she's my partner in pushing legislation to expand support and services available for grandparents and other relatives who are raising children. And we have bipartisan legislation, which I will speak about in a minute that we need your help in trying to move through the senate and the house. I also want to thank Generations United, the Children's Defense Fund, the Child Welfare League of America, AARP, and the National Hispanic Council on Aging for organizing this briefing today, but more than that for all the work that you do to support caregivers.

I want to acknowledge Dorothy Jenkins, she is a constituent of mine and she is a grandparent caregiver and it's so exciting that Dorothy is here to talk about her experiences living in the Grandparent Family Apartments in the South Bronx. It's the first facility in the country built from the ground up specifically for grandparents raising grandchildren, and I was proud to be a co-sponsor of the Legacy Act which became law in 2003 that will make it possible for more facilities, like the Grandparent Family Apartments, to be built across the nation.

And I don't have to tell you how important that is because Kinship caregivers need special support and assistance if they are going to succeed doing the most important job there is, which is raising the next generation. They have so many obstacles, enrolling children in school, securing housing assistance, getting access to medical care, and so the

challenges that caregivers like Dorothy and others face every single day shows how important it is to pass this legislation that Senator Snowe and I have introduced.

Our bill will provide financial support for kinship caregivers who care for children who would otherwise be in the foster care system. It also creates a support network for these caregivers, and kinship caregivers have stepped forward to provide safe and loving homes, but unfortunately we're not doing enough to help them. I've pulled some statistics and I just wanted to briefly run over those and you've probably already heard a lot of this, but it still bears repeating because if we don't focus on it we're going to be really abdicating our responsibility to all these children.

Nationwide, more than 6 million children. Now that's 1 in 12 children, so the next time you see a bunch of kids, like a classroom of kids, a bunch kids on a playground, count off, 1 out of 12 children in our country are living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives. In the Bronx alone, where Dorothy is from, 20,000 grandparents are raising grandchildren. So this is a huge issue. And if we can focus on giving the support that's needed; we keep families together, we keep children out of the foster care system, we help grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, others who care about doing what they in their heart want to do, have the resources to be successful.

The Kinship Caregiver Support Act, Senator Snowe and I are promoting, that we need your help on, contains a Subsidized Guardianship provision, which will give states the option to use their Title IV-E funds to provide payments to grandparents and other relatives who've assumed legal guardianship. The act also establishes the kinship navigator program, and that will help provide the guidance that a lot of these caregivers need, because it's confusing when you're all of a sudden responsible for children and they can be infants to teenagers and we all know how challenging that is.

So I hope that we will really come together around the issue number 1, and obviously personally I hope that we come around together on behalf of our legislation. Senator Snowe is on the finance committee, she's been working very hard to get this bill attached to something that will move, and she needs your help, we both do, and then once we get it through the Senate we will need your help getting it through the house and getting it to the president for signature.

So thank you very, very much for caring about this issue. I loved the rally, the rallies have been great, but the hard work of getting the legislation passed is what this group really has to be focused on. So I want to thank you for inviting me and I look forward to continuing to work with you to make sure that we get it done and we really live up to the idea that is in these picture, these are really beautiful depictions of the relationships that are enabled because of family members taking care of each other. So thank you all very much.