

Senator Dick Durbin
Statement in support of relative caregivers

Mr. PRESIDENT,

I rise to commend the ongoing efforts of relative caregivers all over the State of Illinois, who have opened their hearts to children whose homes have been broken.

Children are placed into foster care for a variety of reasons stemming from neglect to drug addicted parents and often suffer the consequences of the separation. The fate of children who are not adopted or reunited with their birth parents often spells a legacy of instability. Relatives who welcome these children into their homes offer them a stability that can rarely be found in the foster care system.

Subsidized guardianship helps to remove some of the barriers to keeping displaced children within the family. The main obstacle faced by guardians is the cost of upkeep of additional children. Subsidized Guardianship allows relatives to access the same programs that regular foster parents have. These state programs support permanent guardianship placements with relatives by offsetting some of the costs of child rearing.

The correlation between relative placement and success of foster children has never been more apparent than in my own office. One of my summer interns attributes her current success to her aunt and uncle who took both herself and sister in when she was 16. This act of generosity prevented her from dropping out of high school to support her sister. Both girls were too old for adoption and hard to place in foster homes. The placement made it possible for the girls to stay in their current school and their community. Relative care was home when they needed one the most.

As of February 2006, there were over 17,000 children placed in substitute care in Illinois. Across the country, more than 6 million children live in households headed by a grandparent or other relative. Kinship care is important because it helps keep children closer to their family and to their sense of normalcy. Supportive programs such as the Subsidized Guardianship program help children leave the foster care system for the permanent care of nurturing relatives.

Today I offer my formal acknowledgement and deepest appreciation for the ongoing service of these caregivers to our country and our nation's most valuable asset, our children.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.