

Supports for Grandfamilies and Other Family Caregiving

POSITION STATEMENT

Generations United supports public policies that assist family caregivers of all types in caring for family members. Family-friendly national policies will require eliminating barriers to eligibility in current programs, expanding programs to allow greater access, and creating new programs to address the continuing growth in inter-generational caregiving. Special emphasis should be placed on assisting families with low to moderate incomes and limited assets, and those with a history of limited access to federally supported services, such as American Indians and Alaska Natives.

IN ADDITION, GENERATIONS UNITED SUPPORTS

- **Reintroduction and passage of the Kinship Caregivers Support Act, specifically:**
 - **Providing federal funding to be used by states to establish or to expand existing subsidized guardianship programs to support permanent guardianship placements with relatives**
- **Creating statewide kinship navigator programs, such as help desks or hotlines, or “one-stop-shopping” locations, to educate grandparents and other relatives raising children about the resources available to them**
- **Requiring child welfare agencies, as a condition of receiving federal foster care funding, to provide notice, within 60 days of the removal of the child from the custody of the child’s parent(s), to adult grandparents and other relatives of the child, including those recommended by the child’s parents, subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence, where feasible**
- **Allowing states to establish separate licensing standards for relative foster parents and non-relative foster parents, provided both standards protect children and include criminal record checks**
- **Fully funding the LEGACY Intergenerational Housing Act at the authorized level of \$10 million**
- **Creating a Permanence Incentive program based on the concept of the adoption incentives program which recognizes two other types of safe and stable permanence in addition to adoption: guardianship, and reunifications with the child’s family of origin**
- **Increased funding for and implementation of the expansion of the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) included in the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2006. The changes to this program allow more grandparents raising grand-**

“We want them to know we don’t mind doing it, but you need to help us be able to do it.”

Yolanda, a grandmother raising her grandchildren

Intergenerational Intersection

Caregiving of many kinds unites the generations. Whether a grandparent is raising a grandchild or an adult child is caring for an aging parent, the well-being of two, and sometimes more, generations is inextricably linked. In order for these families to flourish, the needs of both caregivers and those cared for must be considered.

children and seniors caring for adult relatives with disabilities to receive assistance through the NFCSP, but it is critical that funding increase proportionally to this expanded group of eligible recipients and that regulations and guidance be crafted that help maximize the effectiveness of this important program

- **Expanding and improving respite care services for grandparent and other relative caregivers, for example through funding the Lifespan Respite Care Act**
- **Expanding and improving mental health services for grandparent- and other relative caregivers and the children they are raising**
- **Eliminating barriers that keep grandparents and other relative caregivers from enrolling children in school and accessing certain key services for the children in their care such as physical and mental health services and school services, including special education**
- **Providing assistance to grandparents and other relative caregivers (who own and live in their own home) to build additional space to accommodate the children who have unexpectedly come into their care**
- **Maintaining the U.S. Census Bureau's collection of data on children in relative care and grandparents raising grandchildren and expanding data collection to include information on aunts, uncles and other non-parent relatives raising children.**

Background

GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER RELATIVES RAISING CHILDREN

Intergenerational family caregiving of all kinds is on the rise. An increasing number of adults are caring for aging parents or other relatives, often at the same time they are raising their own children. More grandparents and other relatives are raising related children. All of these family caregivers make tremendous contributions and, often, serious sacrifices to keep their families together. If not for their efforts, millions of children and other relatives would be denied the opportunity to remain in stable, loving homes.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are over 6 million children living in grandparent- or other relative-headed households, also known as grandfamilies. The vast majority of these children are being raised by grandparents. This trend in families cuts across racial and class lines and is evident in both rural and urban areas. Overall, grandparent caregivers are more likely to live in poverty and to be uninsured than are grandparents not raising grandchildren. According to a 1999 study, one in five children living in grandparent-headed homes and one in four children living in other relative-headed homes were impoverished, as compared with one in six children living in households headed by their parents. The children in these grandfamilies suffer higher-than-average rates of physical, mental, and emotional problems than other children, often due to the issues that brought them into relative care. The caregivers' own health, regardless of health insurance status, often suffers as a consequence of the strains on them of caring for children.

These grandparents and other relative-caregivers perform an extraordinary service

that allows hundreds of thousands of children to maintain vital ties to their families, while simultaneously easing the burden on the public child welfare system. The cost savings – in both human and fiscal terms – are enormous. Of the approximately 2.1 million children living with grandparents or other relatives with no parent present, approximately 145,150 are in the foster care system – almost a fourth of the entire system. The remaining almost 2 million are being cared for outside of the system, by caregivers who often do not have access to any support services or financial assistance. If even half of these 2 million children were to enter the formal foster care system, it would cost taxpayers \$6.5 billion dollars each year and would completely overwhelm the system.¹ Alternative services and financial supports must be implemented for these families. *For more information about grandparents and other relatives raising children, contact GU to obtain a fact sheet or visit www.gu.org.*

STATEWIDE KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAMS

Grandfamilies often report that what they need most is accurate information about the existing programs and services that are available to their families. Statewide kinship navigator programs are toll-free hotlines, help desks, or one-stop-shopping locations that guide families toward and connect them to existing benefits programs, local support groups, respite care programs, and other helpful government and non-profit services. The programs also publish materials and offer helpful websites to share key information. Funding for state navigator programs will help grandfamilies better utilize existing programs and provide a centralized mechanism for creating partnerships between government, non-profit, community and

faith-based agencies to better serve the needs of these families.

SUBSIDIZED GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAMS

Grandfamilies have a continuum of needs. Some families may only need a support group or respite, whereas others need financial assistance. In many states, the only financial assistance available is through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) child-only grants or foster care payments for those relatives who are foster parents. Adoption subsidies are available in every state for children with special needs. Though the definition of special needs varies from state to state, children who are in relative care often qualify. Subsidized guardianship is an important permanency option to have available, especially for grandfamilies. Adoption may not be viable for some relatives. It changes family dynamics. Adopting relative children may turn aunt, brother or grandma into “a parent” in the eyes of the law, permanently altering the identity of the birth mother and father. Adoption terminates all parental rights, which may not be appropriate in some situations such as with a severely disabled parent who physically cannot parent, but wants to remain in the lives of the children who love him or her. Guardianship also respects centuries of tradition in many cultures – including African-American and American Indian – of caring for related children without changing family relationships.

Many states have implemented subsidized guardianship programs, which strive to provide income support to relative caregivers and permanency for the children in their care. In general, subsidized guardianships are designed for those children who have been in state custody, with a relative or non-relative providing the care, for at least six months and in some states up to

“Without the subsidy, we just wouldn’t have been able to take the children.”

Glenn and Charlotte, grandparents raising grandchildren being helped by subsidized guardianship

two years. These subsidized guardianships give the caregiver the opportunity to become the legal guardian of the child without terminating parental rights, thereby replacing the state in that role. Once guardianship is granted, the state issues a monthly subsidy check to the guardian for the care of the child.

NOTIFICATION OF RELATIVES WHEN CHILD IS PLACED IN FOSTER CARE

When it is determined that a child must be removed from the custody of the child's parent(s), some states require their child welfare agencies to give preference to placing the child in the safe home of a relative over placing the child in a foster home. In practice, however, relatives often are not notified when a child is placed in foster care. Some first learn of the child's placement after the child has already been in foster care for several months or years and is moving toward adoption. If relatives step forward at this later stage, the child may already be bonded with the foster parent, and the move to relative care may further disrupt their life. Requiring written notification of adult relatives of children at the point of foster care placement helps increase the child's opportunities to stay with safe family members from the beginning and promotes stability by preventing such interruptions at the point of adoption.

LICENSING STANDARDS FOR RELATIVE FOSTER PARENTS

Foster parents must be licensed by their home state before they are able to provide a home to children in foster care. Certain licensing standards for non-relative foster parents, such as requiring a separate bedroom for each child, may not be appropriate for foster parents who are related to the child. Generations United supports a change in the licensing requirements for

relative foster parents which recognizes their special status. Such a change may help some relative foster parents become eligible for a higher payment.

RESPIRE

Even caregivers who do not necessarily require substantial financial assistance do have a genuine need for some time away from their child care responsibilities – to buy groceries, pick up dry cleaning, visit the doctor or dentist, or even just take a nap. With one or more young children in the household, accomplishing such tasks can become almost insurmountable without some type of episodic relief. Respite care allows caregivers much needed time to themselves, during which they can attend to matters in or outside of the home without having to watch over the children, take them along, or leave them in uncertain or expensive babysitting arrangements. Respite programs can occur in a variety of settings, including the families' homes, providers' homes, camps, residential facilities, day care centers, recreational facilities, churches, therapeutic child development centers, family resource centers, schools, and senior centers. They are often administered by public or private welfare agencies, mental health agencies, religious institutions, family resource centers, child care centers, aging service providers, or a combination thereof.

PERMANENCY

The Adoption Incentives Program established by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, provides incentive payments to states that increase the number of adoptions from the public child welfare system. States report that they have used their incentive payments to recruit and train adoptive families and provide post-adoption services. The program has yielded significant increases in

adoptions since its implementation. At least 238,000 adoptions were completed in the first five years of the program. For children in relative care, however, adoption is not always the best option. Currently there are 20,000 children in foster care with relatives for whom a court has determined neither returning to their parents nor adoption is viable. For these children options such as subsidized guardianship might be more appropriate form of permanency. Building on the work of the adoption incentives program, the creation of a permanence incentive program could include return to parents' home or subsidized guardianship as two other types of safe and stable permanence when they are determined the best option for children.

MEDICAL CARE AND EDUCATION

While grandfamilies often face a host of financial, housing, legal, and emotional problems, they are ineligible for many of the services to which similarly situated families with biological parents are entitled. Grandfamilies also face a range of special physical and mental health challenges. In addition, the health problems of caregivers and care recipients can impact on one another.

A particular challenge is posed by custody requirements, which vary widely by state, and often ignore the role grandparents and other relatives play in raising and nurturing many of today's children. For example, it is often difficult for grandparents to obtain medical treatment for grandchildren in their care. Many insurance companies refuse to allow a grandparent to include a grandchild as a dependent on his or her insurance policy unless the grandparent has adopted the child or has legal custody or guardianship. Many schools refuse to admit children living with grandparents unless one of the parents is

living in the household or the grandparent is the legal guardian.

From July 1, 2006, Medicaid beneficiaries were at risk of losing their health benefits if they were unable to prove their US citizenship. Although many helpful changes to the requirement were implemented by the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006, onerous identification requirements remain for children who are being raised by relatives with no input from child protective services. Paperwork may be difficult to find, and in some states, relatives do not have automatic permission to obtain copies. Even where relatives are able to request copies, the process can be time-consuming and relatively expensive. Safeguarding access to Medicaid for those in most need should be a priority.

In education, the No Child Left Behind Act is due for reauthorization this year. This is a valuable opportunity to recognize the needs of children being raised in grandfamilies.



Joan Rommes

“What children need most are the essentials that grandparents provide in abundance. They give unconditional love, kindness, patience, humor, comfort, lessons in life. And, most importantly, cookies.”

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani

HOUSING

The availability of safe and affordable housing is a major concern for many grandfamilies. Grandparents and other relative caregivers often begin caring for children without warning or preparation, and may have difficulty accommodating children in their current residence. Often caregivers' residences are too small to accommodate one or more children; moreover, the presence of additional children may violate lease agreements. If a grandparent is living in public housing with occupancy restrictions, the addition of children can lead to eviction. Older relative caregivers living in senior housing where children are disallowed may also face eviction. Safe and affordable housing may be particularly difficult for low-income relative caregivers to access.

When implemented, the LEGACY Act signed into law in December 2003 will: create national demonstration projects that provide opportunities within HUD's Section 202 program to develop housing specifically for grandparents and other relatives raising children; train and educate front line workers who, through no fault of their own, may be misinterpreting policies that affect the grandparent- and other relative-headed families; and conduct a national study of the housing needs of grandparents raising grandchildren.

With full funding and implementation, LEGACY will help make substantial strides toward helping provide safe and affordable housing for grandfamilies seeking rental housing. However, substantial numbers of low-income grandparent or other relatives own and live in small homes that are not large enough or otherwise adequate to accommodate children who unexpectedly come into their care. There is a need for supportive programs to help adapt such

homes to be safe and suitable for grandfamilies.

A National Housing Trust Fund would provide helpful support to grandfamilies by producing, rehabilitating, and preserving 2.5 million affordable housing units by 2023. More details are available in the Livable Communities section of this Agenda.

DATA COLLECTION

National, state, and district by district data on the number of children in relative care and grandparents other relatives raising grandchildren is vital to identify and demonstrate the need for ongoing supports to grandfamilies. The U.S. Census Bureau collects information about the number of children in relative care, and some demographic and social characteristic data on grandparents raising grandchildren through their decennial Census and the annual American Community Survey. More data on grandfamilies are needed including information on the numbers of aunts, uncles and other relatives raising children.

OTHER FAMILY CAREGIVING

Family caregivers maintain and coordinate care at home for relatives who are elderly, disabled, and chronically or terminally ill. One in four U.S. households, some 22 million, currently provide such care. A study in 1999 estimated the national economic value of unpaid informal caregiving for ailing adults to be roughly \$200 billion per year, equivalent to approximately one-fifth of the nation's total annual health care expenditure.² Approximately 10 percent of older people would be in nursing homes without the help provided by their families. Over half of family caregivers are women, many caring simultaneously for children or adolescents and parents.

While the majority cite the benefits of caring for family members, the incidence

of feelings of isolation and depression among caregivers is six times higher than the national average. Over half of all caregivers report that their caregiving responsibilities cause them to have less time for other family members or their own activities. Employed caregivers find that have to make problematic and burdensome accommodations by working fewer hours, rearranging schedules, taking time off without pay, or quitting work altogether to become full-time caregivers.

THE NATIONAL FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM (NFCSP)

In 2006, Congress reauthorized the Older Americans Act, which included the National Family Caregiver Support Program. NFCSP authorized 125 million dollars in its first year and has slowly increased (to 187 million dollars in 2011) to fund supportive services to informal family caregivers providing care to an older relative with a serious

chronic illness or disability and for older adults caring for adult relatives with disabilities. Ten percent of funds for the program are available for supportive services to grandparents and other relatives who are over 55 and raising children. *For more information about the NFCSP, contact GU to obtain a fact sheet or visit www.gu.org.*

CHILD CARE

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 50 percent of working families rely on child care providers to care for their children while they work. Research shows that high-quality early childhood programs help children-especially those from families with low incomes-develop the skills they need to succeed in school. These low-income families include a substantial portion of grandparent and other relative headed families. Additional information about child care is found in the Social Supports section of this agenda.