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# Grandfamilies as Advocates

Raising the visibility of the unique challenges and solutions for grandfamilies with people who can make change in your state or community

## DECISION MAKERS

- Governor's Office
- Your State Senator and/or Representative
- Area Agency on Aging Director
- State or Regional Child Welfare Office Director
- County or community leaders that make decisions about programs that are important to your family or other grandfamilies.

## COVID-19 and Grandfamilies

- Nationally, nearly 1 in 10 children live in households headed by a grandparent or other relative.
- Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, grandfamilies faced barriers to housing, health care, food, and financial assistance. The current crisis has heightened the fragility of these households.
- Grandfamily caregivers, because of their age or underlying health conditions, are at high risk for contracting coronavirus and suffering severe health consequences or death.
- Many grandfamilies are struggling to get food, medical supplies, and access necessary supports. Some families may not be able to go to stores and many who were working are losing full or part time jobs.

## WAYS TO HELP

- **Kinship Navigator Programs** are administered locally to provide grandfamilies with information and to connect them to supports and community-based services. These programs can help grandfamilies obtain supplies and support they need during the pandemic. Most child welfare systems have some federal funds to create or operate these programs. Will you help ensure these programs involve one-on-one help accessing public benefits and supports, especially for those grandfamilies who are not involved with foster care?
- **Family Caregiver Support Programs** provide services and supports to family caregivers, including grandfamily caregivers. These programs are operated through Area Agencies on Aging and received additional federal funding for COVID-19 response. How are those funds helping grandfamilies in my community?
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** TANF child-only grants help grandfamily caregivers meet the needs of the children. These grants are often the only source of financial support to grandfamilies. Can you improve access to these important grants by allowing and promoting an easy child-only application?

- **Technology and Internet Access** for many grandfamilies may not be financially feasible. They need computers and internet access and they may struggle to understand how to use new technology. We know there was new federal funding for schools and to the Governor's office to support technology. Can you tell me how that funding is being used in my community and how we can support children in grandfamilies during this unique time?
- **Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (P-EBT)** provides food resources (SNAP) through an EBT card for all families with children who receive free or reduced lunch if schools have been closed. Can you tell me if our state has approved this option and how families, and specifically grandfamilies, will be notified that they are eligible or automatically enrolled?

## PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING

### 1. Call or email to request a meeting.

Example: *"Good morning, my name is Maria Smith and I would like to schedule a meeting with Mr. Grands about supporting grandfamilies like mine."*

### 2. Learn more about the person you are meeting with.

What programs do they operate? Have they spoken about supporting grandfamilies before? Do they have a personal connection? What are their policy and program interests?

### 3. Develop a brief story about your family.

This you can use as you introduce yourself at the beginning of the meeting. It provides context for the conversation you are about to have and details that make it relevant to the decision maker.

Example: *"My name is Maria Smith and I am the grandparent and primary caretaker of my two grandchildren, ages 5 and 15. I have had my grandchildren for the last year as my daughter is recovering from substance use. Because we are hoping this is temporary, I did not want my grandchildren to enter the foster care system. Although I know this is better for my grandchildren, not having legal*

*guardianship causes problems that foster care families or legal guardians do not have. I was hoping to talk to you about how that is playing out now during this COVID-19 crisis."*

### 4. Have clear talking points with you.

Be clear about what you want the decision maker to remember and what they can do to help (also known as "the ask"). There are talking points in this document to help get you started.

### 5. Be prepared to answer their questions or to get back to them.

If you don't know the answer to the decision maker's question, don't make up an answer. Simply tell them you will get them the information (and be sure to follow up with it!). However, some questions can be anticipated and you can prepare in advance. We have given a few examples in this document.

### 6. Follow-up after the meeting.

Always send an email or a handwritten note to the decision maker after the meeting, which includes a thank you for their time and any information you promised during the meeting.

Example: *"Thank you Mr. Grands for talking with me yesterday about unique challenges grandfamilies face during this COVID-19 crisis. We appreciate your support of grandfamilies to help them access food and medicine deliveries and to remove barriers they face in receiving TANF cash assistance to pay for basic necessities. I have attached the background information on grandfamilies that I mentioned on our call. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions at [mariasmith@email.com](mailto:mariasmith@email.com) or (222) 222-2222. Thank you."*

### 7. Most of all be yourself!

You have an important story to tell and you are the best advocate for your family. Public officials are there to serve, but they can't fix things they don't know. Be authentic. They may not know much about grandfamilies so they need to know what your family and families like yours need.