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Contact: Jennifer Stapleton

[jennifer@brassrc.com](mailto:jennifer@brassrc.com), 202-577-8720

## New report shows how family-support systems are failing to help 2.6 million children growing up in grandfamilies without parents in the home

*(Washington, DC, December 9, 2021)* — According to a [new report](#) released today by Generations United, 2.6 million children live in “grandfamilies,” meaning children are raised by relatives or close family friends without their parents in the home. Grandfamilies form out of events that separate children from their parents, such as parental death, including from COVID-19, substance use and drug overdoses, incarceration, deportation, mental illness, divorce, or military deployment.

Support and services for families in areas such as housing, education, and health care were not designed for grandfamilies. In the United States, the quality and level of support and services a family can receive depend on personal characteristics, like sex, age, race, socioeconomic status, or a caregiver’s legal or personal relationship with a child. For example, children in grandfamilies are not supported as children in traditional foster care; if a grandfamily caregiver does not have a legal relationship to a child, something as simple as enrolling the child in school or taking them to the doctor can be difficult or impossible; and in some states, a caregiver who is not related by blood or marriage cannot apply on a child’s behalf for benefits such as Medicaid or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

“All children deserve a safe, stable, and loving home with access to healthy food, a quality education, and health care,” said Donna Butts, executive director of Generations United. “When children cannot remain with their parents, they do best with people who know and love them. We must do more to ensure grandfamilies have access to the basic support they need to help the children they raise thrive.”

Children of all races, socioeconomic levels, ages, and geographic regions are living in grandfamilies. But, Black, American Indian, and Alaska Native children are more likely to grow up in a grandfamily.

“A fundamental flaw in the U.S.’s approach to family policy, systems, and support is that help is based on a family’s characteristics instead of children’s needs,” said Jennie Day-Burget, senior communications officer with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which co-funded the report. “We need to improve policies around housing, education, financial assistance, and health care to fix the siloed, inadequate systems that don’t consider all family types.”

The report seeks to elevate the unique needs of grandfamilies and calls on federal, state, and local governments to build stronger systems of support to help grandfamilies thrive. Some recommendations include:

- Support the development and sustained use of quality **kinship navigator programs**. These programs offer information, referral, and follow-up services to grandparents and other relatives raising children to link them to the benefits and services that they or the children need.
- Promote financial equity for grandfamilies by creating a **kinship caregiver tax credit**, improving access to **foster-care maintenance payments** and **TANF**.
- Implement the recommendations of the initial [Report to Congress from the Federal Advisory Council to Support Grandfamilies Raising Grandchildren](#). Important recommendations include changing **workplace policies** to recognize the caregiving needs of grandfamily caregivers and improving grandfamilies’ access to **respite care, child care, and counseling**.
- Support grandfamilies as **part of opioid settlement funds**.

### [Download the report.](#)

Generations United experts available for comment include:

- Donna Butts, Executive Director
- Jaia Peterson Lent, Deputy Executive Director and Director of the National Center on Grandfamilies

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### **About Generations United**

*For more than three decades, Generations United has been the catalyst for policies and practices stimulating cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together. We believe that we can only be successful in the face of our complex future if generational diversity is regarded as a national asset and fully leveraged. The National Center on Grandfamilies is a critical part of Generations United’s mission and strives to enact policies and promote programs that support relative caregivers and the children they raise, and Generations United’s new National Technical Assistance Center on Grandfamilies and Kinship Families seeks to help systems break down their silos and improve supports for the families. [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)*