

# 2026 Updates

## KINSHIP UNITY ACTION AGENDA

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united**  
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**think of us**  
Driving Systems Change  
in Child Welfare

**ABA**  
AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION  
Center on Children  
and the Law

Generations United, ABA Center on Children and the Law, and Think of Us hosted the release of the Kinship Unity Action Agenda – a collective advocacy tool to guide our future work to support kinship families on February 8, 2024.

On February 1-2, 2023, Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies convened its fifth gathering of national advocates, featuring professionals with diverse perspectives and individuals with lived experience in grandfamilies/kinship families. The primary objective was to identify and prioritize key policy opportunities, laying the groundwork for a robust and actionable national kinship action agenda. Post-convening, feedback from the broader advocacy community, grandfamilies services providers, and focus groups with kinship caregivers from varied backgrounds enriched the action agenda. Geographically and racially diverse kinship caregivers provided valuable insights, shaping the agenda into a comprehensive reflection of their needs and concerns.

We have seen progress in all priority action areas in federal policy, the advocacy community, and on-the-ground practice. However, there is still much more work to be done. This update highlights major collective accomplishments from the field that have national implications. It is not designed to be a comprehensive overview of the important, ongoing state and community-based work happening across the country every day. If you have additional accomplishments with national impact you would like to be considered for inclusion in future updates, please email them to [gu@gu.org](mailto:gu@gu.org) with the subject "Kinship Unity Agenda Update".

### Ensure that kinship caregivers receive equitable financial and other supports

- A September 2023 [federal rule](#) now requires that all licensed or approved kin caring for children in foster care receive the same Foster Care Maintenance Payments as non-related foster parents.
- Since the [new federal rule](#) allowing for kin-specific licensing standards, 17 states and 6 tribes have IV-E plans approved for kin-specific licensing standards. For updates, see this [national map tracking implementation](#).
  - Advocates released [model kin-specific licensing standards](#) and [Development and Implementation of Tribal Foster Care and Relative/Kinship Care Standards](#).
  - The current Administration for Children and Families initiative, [A Home for Every Child](#), emphasizes prioritizing kin and the Assistant Secretary, Alex Adams, speaks about the value of kin-specific licensing.
- [Many state child welfare systems](#) require equitable funding be provided for the child as soon as the child moves into the home of their kinship caregiver.
- Generations United's Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network released a [TANF policy brief](#) with model state examples and new state specific TANF child only grant kinship data. They have also conducted national and local presentations about action strategies for improving TANF supports for kin.
- The Helping Students SOAR with Social Security Act (SB 3188) was introduced in the 118th Congress by Senator Van Hollen. If passed, the bill would reinstate the Social Security survivors benefit for children of deceased or disabled workers for students enrolled in colleges or an alternative vocational school through age 26.

- There has been expansion of statewide kinship navigator programs.
  - Six kinship navigator programs have been approved by the Title IV-E Prevention-based Services Clearinghouse making state or Tribal IV-E agencies that adopt the models eligible for federal reimbursement for 50% of costs.
  - Eligible states and Tribes received formula grant kinship navigator funding for two additional years.
  - The Supporting America's Children and Families Act (HR 9076) authorized four years of funding (\$10 million per year) for kinship navigator programs who apply and are approved through a competitive grant process.

## Ensure policies that meet kinship basic needs

- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly, a program that includes \$35 million in funding to support the development of intergenerational housing for caregivers aged 62+ who are raising children.
- There has been increased attention to supporting the educational needs of students living with kin.
  - Generations United's [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) released an [education toolkit](#) to help school professionals and kinship service providers improve educational supports for children living with kin.
  - New [Non-Regulatory Joint Federal Guidance on Foster Care and Education](#) from the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services answers questions about education for students living with relatives outside of the child welfare system in question A-4, but does not mention how McKinney-Vento may apply to these students.
  - Generation United released their 2024 State of Grandfamilies and Kinship Care Report on education - [Pathways to Success: K-12 Education and Support for Kinship and Grandfamilies](#).
- The [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#), in partnership with [FRAC](#), released and updates several resources on food and nutrition supports for grandfamilies including:
  - [Summer Nutrition Programs for Kinship/Grandfamilies](#)
  - [School Breakfast and Lunch Programs for Grandfamilies and Kinship Families](#)
  - [Federal Nutrition Programs for Grandfamilies and Kinship Families](#)
  - [Federal Nutrition Programs and Emergency Food Referral Chart for Grandfamilies and Kinship Families](#)
- The Adoption Tax Credit was made partially refundable (up to \$5,000 per child). The Child Tax Credit was maintained.
- The Administration for Children and Families officially [notified governors](#) that Social Security Survivor Benefits earned by a deceased parent's lifetime contributions intended for a child in foster care must be passed through to the child/youth instead of being used to reimburse agency costs.
- The [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) (Network), funded through a cooperative agreement with the Administration for Community Living, created a [range of resources](#) for professionals that contain information and resources they can use in caregiver trainings, navigation services, and outreach services to educate kinship caregivers on services and benefits available to them.
  - The Network has delivered nearly 60 webinars and presentations, and produced over 50 resources for kinship service professionals across multiple systems and roles who serve kinship families in their communities including a resource series on Why Kinship Matters. This series educated multiple systems on the strengths and challenges of kinship families and the importance of supporting them. Targeted systems professionals included: Aging, Child Welfare, Education, TANF, and Nutrition.
  - The Network is currently providing in-depth technical assistance, over a two year period, to Idaho, San Diego County, CA and the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin which is designed to support cross-system collaboration to provide more coordinated and effective services to kinship families.
  - The Network and partner, [USAging](#), facilitated a peer learning community for aging programs interested in serving grandfamilies.

- The [Supporting America's Children and Families Act \(HR 9076\)](#), signed into law in 2025, includes a provision to require states to consult with people with lived experience, including kinship caregivers and youth, in developing their Child and Family Services Plans.
- In 2025, [Think of Us](#) designed and launched the [California Kinship Accelerator](#), a first-of-its-kind, multi-county implementation initiative aimed at translating kin-first policy into consistent frontline practice across the nation's largest child welfare system.
- [Family Voices United](#) (a partnership between FosterClub, Generations United, the Children's Trust Fund Alliance, and Casey Family Programs) released a series of resources that lifts up lived experience, strengthens community connections, and informs decision-makers so that child welfare is understood and improved through the voices of those most affected.
- Generations United's [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) is hosting two learning communities for small kinship programs, led by kin caregivers, to help them expand their programs and reach more families in their communities.
- In March 2024, the Children's Bureau co-hosted with [Think of Us](#) a national convening on kinship care which assembled policymakers, advocates, practitioners, and child welfare agency directors and leaders to celebrate the kin-specific licensing rule and discuss new ways to enhance support for kinship families.
- The [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) created multiple resources for professionals, leaders, and organizations working with kinship families, including: [Engaging Kin in Programmatic Decision-making](#), [Setting Up a Grandfamily Council](#), and [Kinship Peer Mentoring](#).
- [Children's Trust Fund Alliance](#), [Generations United](#), [Foster Club](#), and [ZERO TO THREE](#) released [Promoting Peer Support in Child Welfare](#).
- [Think of Us](#) published two reports: [Kin, First and Foremost](#) which includes extensive field research and insights into experiences of youth, families, and professionals involved with kinship care; and [Kinship Care Literature Review](#) which is a comprehensive review of recent literature on kinship care.

## Ensure racial/cultural equity, and respect and support tribal sovereignty

- [Federal licensing rule](#) allows states and Tribes to develop separate, common sense foster care licensing standards for kinship foster family homes.
- The Administration for Children and Families released a program instruction in December 2024 ([ACF-ACYF-CB-PI-24-11](#)) about Tribal Title IV-E Agency requirements for electing Title IV-E Prevention and Family Services Programs including prevention program requirements, the exemption of Tribal IV-E agencies from the evaluation waiver and continuous quality improvement requirements, and the flexibility Title IV-E agencies may provide tribes.
- In 2024, there were [new policies in the Child Welfare Policy Manual](#) that provides Tribes operating Title IV-E through agreement with a state the flexibility to provide Title IV-E prevention services and programs adapted to the culture and context of the Tribal communities services the agreement and determine the practice criteria for these services.
- In May 2024, the Administration of Children, Youth, and Families released a [new rule](#) allowing states to use federal funding for legal representation for indigenous communities with the intention of placement within the child's tribe, adhering to the goal of tribal self-governance.

## Ensure that the child welfare system respects, values, and fully supports kinship families

- A [Kin-Finding/Kin Engagement Toolkit](#) was developed by Generations United's [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) with input from child welfare professionals and lived experts from every state, many tribes, and most territories. The toolkit was widely distributed and used in regional, national, and local trainings. Additionally, the Network is hosting a learning community on kin-finding, drawn from these strategies.
  - The [Child Welfare Playbook](#) team is doing a statewide codesign of kin-finding and engagement with Washington's Department of Children, Youth and Families in order to further update the Kin-Finding/Kin Engagement Toolkit.
- Several states have passed laws to address caseworkers placing children with kin to educate caregivers about their care arrangement options and supports available through each option.
  - [KY Bill S. 151](#) was signed into law in Kentucky giving kinship caregivers, who are contacted by the child welfare agency to care for a child, time to make a decision about whether to care for the child as a foster parent or through a guardianship arrangement outside of foster care.
  - The [KIND Act](#) passed in Illinois in 2024 and emphasizes the role of the child welfare agency to provide information about kinship options and the financial impact of these decisions.
  - The Hidden Foster Care Coalition released a [model state law](#) which was approved as a policy by ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council).
- The [ABA Center on Children and the Law](#), with support from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, released a [Kinship Legal Toolkit](#) in September of 2024. This toolkit was created to assist judges and attorneys understand the value of kinship, the federal laws impacting kin, and their role in ensuring kinship placement and permanency for children in care.

## Provide affordable, high-quality legal representation for kinship families

- In May 2024, the Administration of Children, Youth, and Families released a [new rule](#) that allows Title IV-E agencies to claim Federal Financial Participation (FFP) for the administrative costs of legal representation of relatives caregivers. This rule creates an opportunity for the expanded use of federal funds for legal representation for kinship caregivers, who often need, but can't afford, representation.
- Generations United's [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) and the [ABA Center on Children and the Law](#) partnered to spotlight [legal service models](#) that provide replicable ideas to legal professionals wanting to provide supportive legal assistance to kinship families in their communities.
- The [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) created a resource on [Legal Options for Grandfamily and Kinship Caregivers](#) for kinship navigators to share with families.

## Support effective strategies to change the public narrative on kinship care

- [Generations United](#) released and broadly shared resources highlighting the benefits of kinship care:
  - [The Costs of Caregiving: Why Supporting Grandfamilies & Kinship Care is Good for Our Children and Our Nation's Economy](#)
  - [Children Thrive in Grandfamilies](#)

- The [Supporting America's Children and Families Act \(HR 9076\)](#), signed into law in 2025, does several things to support kinship families, including:
  - Authorizes \$10 million in funding annually for four years for competitive matching grants for kinship navigator programs. Eligible applicants include non-profit community-based organizations. Government child welfare agencies who apply are required to coordinate with other local agencies serving families.
  - A provision that explicitly allows states to use funding from the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program for peer support and peer mentorship programs for youth, caregivers, and parents.
  - [Generations United](#) created a [resource about this new law](#).
- The [National Network for Foster Sibling Connections](#) was founded in late 2024 and is dedicated to protecting the rights of siblings in the foster care system, ensuring that they be placed together and remain connected when joint placement isn't possible. This new network brings together social workers, dependency attorneys, judges, CASAs, caregivers, parents, program staff, and individuals with lived experience to advocate for stronger legal protections and systemic change.
- Generations United's [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) promotes coordination across services including family resource centers and have created specific resources describing how family resource centers support kinship families.
- At least six states have included kinship families in plans for use of state opioid settlement funds including Alabama, Alaska, Massachusetts, Nevada, Ohio, and West Virginia. Generations United created [advocacy resources](#) to help additional states advocate for inclusion of grandfamilies in use of opioid settlement funds.

## Enhance social science research on all kinship families to better address inequities across systems

- In December 2025, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report: [Relatives Raising Children: Federal Support Helps But Challenges Persist](#). This report looked at what kinship families are, challenges that exist for kinship families, and what communities and the governments are doing to support kinship families. This report also included some data points disaggregated by race.
- A federal bill, the Hidden Foster Care Transparency Act (HR 5507/S 2025), was introduced in 2025 and would require states to track and report on "hidden foster care" arrangements where children are placed with relatives informally, outside formal court oversight in an effort to address gaps in federal data.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation released the [Family Ties Series: Analysis from a State by State Survey on Kinship Families](#) including:
  - [Unlocking Foster Care Licensing for More Kinship Caregivers](#)
  - [Supporting Unlicensed Kinship Caregivers](#)
  - [New Insights on State Kinship Diversion Policies](#)
  - [Kinship Policy Improvements toward Child Welfare System Transformation](#)
  - [Include Kin When Designing Solutions for Children in Care](#)
- The Children's Bureau released an updated [AFCARS website/dashboard](#) with data from 2023 and 2024 which provides national and state level data on various child welfare and kinship data points.
- Adverse Placement Scores (APS) is working with Foster Insights at the University of Chicago which is encouraging focus on the percent of time in care with kin and collecting strong measures to validate that children placed with kin have better outcomes on every measure than others. They are currently in 13 states and adding more.