
MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

S.3109/A.6269

The NYS KinCare Coalition and NYS Kinship Navigator urges passage of this legislation to establish the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman.

The NYS KinCare Coalition, led by the NYS Kinship Navigator, is the voice of the kinship community, relatives, especially grandparents, who are raising children when parents are unable or unwilling to do so. Children being raised by relatives and close family friends often happens at the behest of the child welfare system, with data indicating that about 50% of all children living with kinship caregivers had prior contact with child protective services. With over 195,000 children living with kin in New York, it is imperative to ensure they have access to an impartial Ombudsman to help rectify situations in which families have been taken advantage of or not given the choice to obtain additional supports. Because of this, we strongly support the passage of S.3109 (Persaud)/A.6269 (Frontus). If enacted, this legislation would create a strong, effective and publicly accountable office that can neutrally and impartially mediate conflict, provide information, and protect the interests and rights of youth and caregivers in foster care.

Nearly [1 in 5](#) children in New York's foster care system live in an institution. New York currently, as it has for decades, places a higher percentage of children in congregate care [than the national average](#). Youth of color, especially Black children, are [disproportionately](#) represented in New York's child welfare system because their families are disproportionately investigated by child protective services, removed from their families, and placed in foster care.

Children experience better health, safety, and well-being [outcomes](#) when they are cared for by supportive families. Federal child welfare reform, known as the Family First Prevention Services Act ("Family First"), financially incentivizes reduced use of congregate settings, increased support for kin caregivers, and strengthened community-based preventive services. New York will be required to comply with Family First in [September 2021](#).

New York has long struggled to recruit and retain enough kin and foster caregivers to meet the needs of youth in its child welfare system. Additionally, some New York counties rely on kin to care for children who were removed from their parents' care – [without providing them financial support](#). The shortage of well-supported kin and foster caregivers deprives New York's children of quality family-based care, and has and continues to impede New York's efforts to prepare for Family First implementation – and undermines well-being of children in the child welfare system.

Even before COVID-19 hit New York in March 2020, youth and caregivers in New York's child welfare system needed one place to turn to that would mediate conflict, provide information, and help protect their interests and rights. The stress, isolation and economic fall-out of the pandemic have only increased the need for



focused support. In addition, the looming Family First implementation deadline for New York State of September 2021 makes the need for New York to establish an Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman more urgent.

Sincerely,

Ryan Johnson, MSW
Policy Coordinator, NYS KinCare Coalition
Associate Director, NYS Kinship Navigator
ryanjohnson@cfcrochester.org
585-315-9641