
Kinship Programs Budget Recommendations

A. Development of a System of Kinship Navigator Services

The generic term “kinship navigators” includes both traditional “information and referral” navigators and “direct service” navigators. With the enactment of the Family First Prevention Services Act, creating potential matching funds for kinship navigators, and the federal appropriations of \$20 million dollars per year for implementation and enhancements of kinship navigators across the nation, it is evident that supports for kinship families not in foster care are a significant policy for states and Congress. New York should decide to build on its existing services and develop a more robust system that incorporates important best practices from across the nation. A leading example of recent state action comes from Ohio, which recently funded their statewide kinship service provision network with \$8.5 million dollars. The below proposal seeks to move the budget towards a similar level of funding, by increasing funding to \$5 million from the current \$2,559,250. See Appendix A for information about Ohio’s kinship program funding.

In New York, kinship services funding fluctuated significantly since 2003, but has stabilized in recent years:

Executive Funding History

Since FY 2012-13, the Governor’s budget has provided \$338,750 for direct service “kinship care programs”, and \$220,500 for the “information and referral” service kinship navigator.

Legislative additions to the Executive Budget

In FY 2015-16, the Legislature added \$1 million for “kinship care programs”

Since FY 2016-17, the Legislature added \$1.9 million for “kinship care programs” and \$100,000 for the kinship navigator.

Current Kinship Services in New York

Since funding has stabilized, the 22 “kinship care programs” funded at a total of \$2,238,750 served 3,551 children during the two-year period from 9/1/16-8/31/18 (this year’s numbers are pending).

The NYS Kinship Navigator funded at \$320,500 served 5,488 callers via its helpline during the same two year period. The Navigator has maintained and updated a centralized kinship information database on its website which has had over 200,000 visits, and as a Regional Model was introduced in 2016, has performed about 120 presentations per year and numerous advocacy/informational meetings.

The Navigator also has a federal appropriation as OCFS sole source for kinship services of \$637,000 per year, which is shared with 5 kinship care programs around the state and the Center for Human Services Research as the evaluator of program services.

B. FY 2020-21 OCFS Kinship Programs Budget Recommendation (Funded at \$2,238,750):

INCREASE FUNDING FOR EACH LOCAL KINSHIP CARE PROGRAMS - FUND 20 PROGRAMS AT \$200,000 EACH (SUGGESTED FUNDING AT \$4,000,000)

OCFS’s local kinship program contracts end in August 2020. OCFS has indicated that it intends to draft a new RFA



and to issue it before the April 1, 2020 budget deadline, if they feel assured money will be made available in the budget. The current programs receive about \$98,000/\$103,000 per budget year. Most of the best performing programs, especially those in metropolitan areas, cannot provide adequate services at that amount of funding.

In the past, kinship care programs in NY were funded with as much as \$162,000 per year, and in other years programs had to close because of no funding.

The Kinship Navigator and the local programs recommend higher levels of funding. Robust programs that could implement the best practices and meet the highest needs of caregivers should have enough funding – at least \$200,000 each – in order to implement best practices for children and maintain children safely outside of the foster care system. Funding 20 programs with capabilities to serve multiple counties at \$200,000 each would cost \$4 million.

A concern is that OCFS's RFA will likely state a funding limit per program and it could be too low. Also, more organizations are now interested in kinship care and new organizations will undoubtedly seek funding. Any new RFA will likely be weighted to provide credit to programs with established histories of kinship services. In the past, inconsistent funding opportunities have caused some excellent kinship programs to simply cease competing and close their programs. Therefore it's important that existing quality programs continue to be funded.

**C. FY 2020-21 OCFS Kinship Navigator Budget Recommendation (Funded at \$320,500):
INCREASE FUNDS FOR THE KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM AND AMEND THE KINSHIP NAVIGATOR LINE ITEM
(SUGGESTED FUNDING AT \$1,000,000)**

The Kinship Navigator successfully expanded its educational services in the last two years. This work has partially been funded via the federal pilot project. The Navigator's core program functions, a centralized kinship information database and assistance to caregivers in accessing and obtaining benefits, has continued to expand and the demand for its existence consistently exceeds its resources.

Given the evolution of kinship services and the Navigator's key role, there are many services and collaborative efforts that the Navigator could implement but for its program and funding limitations. Enhanced funding would allow the Kinship Navigator to expand upon its successful regional work, hiring kinship experts regionally to offer specialized virtual assistance across the state, participation in state and county stakeholder groups and service collaborations, as well as offer localized training and education with state, county, and voluntary agencies. The demand for the educational work of the NYS Kinship Navigator has continued to rise with the increase in use of kinship caregivers as placements for children, and such activities would require a significant increase in funding. Additionally, the budget would need to add caregiver "direct services" to the Navigator's line item to ensure that the evaluation project can continue beyond September 2020.

For services and expenses of the Catholic Family Center in Rochester to establish and operate a statewide kinship information, education and referral network.

Appendix A

Ohio State Kinship Navigator Program

See attached H.B. 14 – legislative addition of \$5,000,000 to the Executive proposed \$3,500,000 for kinship services statewide, split in to 10 regions.

Here is the proposed kinship navigator structure from Ohio:

