

2018-19 Kinship Care Legislative Agenda

Supported by the NYS Kinship Navigator and the NYS KinCare Coalition

New York State is confronting a heroin/opioid crisis that is dramatically increasing placements of addicted parents' children in kinship homes. Kinship caregivers are grandparents, other family members, and family friends. Recent news articles highlight the alarming rise in kinship care:

- [The New York Times: Children of the Heroin Crisis Find Refuge in Grandparents' Arms](#)
- [NBC News: Opioid Crisis Forces Grandparents to Raise Their Grandkids](#)
- [Vox.com: The opioid crisis is making grandparents parents again](#)

Data from the NYS Kinship Navigator (KN) federal demonstration project documents that the most predominant reason for kinship care is parental drug use. In its Center for Human Services Research Foundation child welfare study, over 55% of mothers whose children were living in kinship homes had histories of drug abuse.

More than 200,000 children live with kin; less than 3,500 are in kinship foster care. Kinship families are “on their own” but still provide a multiplicity of protective factors for children and are an acknowledged cost-effective alternative to foster care. Kinship care program services ensure that family members can safely and effectively care for children. KN and the NYS KinCare Coalition jointly support the following legislative actions to support kinship families:ⁱ

Recommendation 1: Support Kinship Families by Funding Local Programs at \$2,238,750 & the Statewide Kinship Navigator at \$600,500

- New York State funds 22 local kinship care programs that cover 22 counties, providing case management services, support groups, parent education, and other vital services. The Governor’s budget proposes \$338,750 in funding. We request that the legislature continue to add \$1.9 million, maintaining funding at \$2,380,750, as it has done for the past two budget years.
- The Kinship Navigator serves the entire state, providing information, referral, and education via its help line, website, and educational presentations. The Governor proposes \$220,500. We request that the legislature continue to add \$100,000, as it has done for the past two years and further increase funding by \$280,000 to allow the Navigator to target enhanced supports in the 40 counties, mostly rural, with no local kinship resources.

Recommendation 2: Amend Social Services Law Section 392 to Require Local Departments of Social Services to Refer Kinship Caregivers to Kinship Services

- The current law requires local district social services to “make available” information on kinship benefits and services. But too often caregivers do not learn about their benefits and options for care. The law should ensure that districts child welfare and benefit workers provide such information and also make referrals to an OCFS administered kinship program, either the Kinship Navigator or a local program that serves all kinship families. Referrals would ensure that families no longer “fall through the cracks” and fail to receive essential services.

Recommendation 3: Declare September as Kinship Care Month

- Each year since 2014, the Governor and NYS Legislature have passed resolutions declaring September as Kinship Care Month. This action is a great way to honor the hard work, dedication, and sacrifice of kinship families.

Recommendation 4: Legislature Should Review Diversion Practices and Enact Reforms

- In December 2017, Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee, Chair of the Children and Families Committee, held a hearing on the practice of diverting children away from foster care by using kin as an unsupported resource. We request that the Legislature listen to the stories of caregivers at local round tables, hold hearings, and devise solutions that ensure children who need foster care services can qualify for kinship foster care.

ⁱ Legislative bills addressing particular issues related to kinship care are the subject of a separate memo.