



Council on Children and Families

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NATIONAL KINSHIP CARE REPORT HIGHLIGHTS OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR RELATIVES AND CAREGIVERS

The new **KIDS COUNT** report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ***STEPPING UP FOR KIDS***, highlights the importance of kinship care and outlines how state governments and communities can help these relatives. Nationally, there are 2.7 million children cared for by extended family members and close family friends. In New York, about 153,000 children are living in this type of household, which represents about 3 percent of all children 18 years and younger in the state.

NYS Office of Children and Family Services Commissioner Gladys Carrión said, "There is no doubt that kinship care is critically important for children who cannot remain with their parents. It offers children strong familial bonds, and a sense of positive identity, belonging and security knowing they are cared for by family members and other adults whom they love and trust. We have worked to ensure these relatives get the support they need to continue in their role as caregivers for these children—New York State is a leader in kinship care."

Research has shown that children in kinship foster care are better able to adjust to their new environment and less likely to experience psychiatric disorders than children in the regular foster care population. Also, children in kinship foster care are less likely to experience behavioral problems and school disruptions, both of which can contribute to positive outcomes.

The challenges kinship caregivers often encounter are detailed in ***STEPPING UP FOR KIDS***, including:

- **Financial:** Kin caregivers are more likely to be poor, single, older, less-educated and unemployed, which makes taking on such additional costs as child care and health insurance an extra burden. They often are unfamiliar with available government support programs or struggle to access them, particularly in the case of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) — the primary federal financial aid program for low-income families.
- **Emotional:** Kin caregivers must deal with the trauma children in their care face due to parental separation, as well as possible emotional and behavioral issues tied to abuse or neglect.



Council Member Agencies

State Office for the Aging * Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services

Andrew M. Cuomo

Office of Children and Family Services * Division of Criminal Justice Services * State Education Department
Department of Health * Department of Labor * Office of Mental Health
Office for People With Developmental Disabilities * Office of Probation and Correctional Alternatives
Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities * Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance



Deborah A. Benson

- **Legal:** Kin caregivers sometimes lack the necessary legal authority to access basic medical care, give medical consent, or enroll a child for school. Requirements for becoming licensed foster parents, which are not always applicable to kinship families, present additional hurdles to receiving the same benefits as non-relatives taking in children.

STEPPING UP FOR KIDS highlights three primary recommendations for states, which include:

1. **Increase their financial stability** through TANF-funded programs, specifically designed to meet their unique needs.

To support families in New York State, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the Office for Temporary Disabilities and Assistance (OTDA) have put in place educational materials regarding kinship families' eligibility for TANF child-only grants that include Medicaid health insurance coverage for the children. Also, the eligibility of kinship families extends to the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in most cases based on the child's income level.

2. **Remove barriers within the child welfare system** through policies that formally seek to involve relatives in a child's care, and reforms to foster-home licensing requirements.

In New York State, OCFS has a long-established policy of seeking relatives whenever a child needs out of home care and providing relatives with their options.

The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) was launched a year ago and enables foster children to achieve permanent placements with related foster parents (also called relative foster care or kinship foster care) by providing financial support and, in most cases medical coverage, upon their discharge from foster care.

OCFS foster care licensing regulations also emphasize safety considerations and allow non-safety related regulations to be waived for relative foster care providers in conformity with federal statute. To further support kin caregivers, local departments of social services across the state are allowed to conduct an emergency home study while relatives are in the process of becoming foster parents, which enables children to stay with their relatives from removal through the licensing approval process, rather than being placed in a different foster home until the relative is fully approved.

3. **Establish laws and resources to bolster kinship families** by promoting stable housing, access to child health care and community-based services for older relatives.

In New York State, community-based services provide relatives with guidance through the financial, emotional and legal challenges to being a relative caregiver.

The **New York State Kinship Navigator** is a statewide resource for kinship families who are searching for information and assistance. It is both a website (<http://www.nysnavigator.org/>) and a toll-free hotline (877-454-6463) with trained kinship specialists who offer guidance and resources on educational law, social security, kinship caregiver rights and eligibility for benefits and kinship events across the state. This resource is available for all relative caregivers inside and outside the foster care system. Navigator Kinship Specialists are available weekdays from 10:00 am – 4:00 pm.

Kin caregivers also can get information regarding their financial and legal options by accessing [Having A Voice and a Choice: Handbook for Relatives Raising Children](#) . More KinGAP information is available at http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/kinship/background_and_process.asp

Stepping Up for Kids includes the latest kinship care data for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information will be available May 23 at 12:01 a.m. EDT on www.aecf.org/kinship.