

The Costs of Caregiving:

Why Supporting Grandfamilies and Kinship Care is Good for Children and Our Nation's Economy

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GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER KIN CAREGIVERS: HELPING CHILDREN AND OUR NATION'S ECONOMY

Grandparents and other kin caregivers strengthen the very fabric of our nation. The latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows they raise about **2.5 million children**¹ whose parents cannot. These caregivers keep children with family and out of the overburdened foster care system. For every **1 child being raised by kin in foster care, there are 19 children being raised by kin outside of foster care.**² Caregivers in these families, known as kinship or grandfamilies, use their own limited resources to provide **billions of dollars** in care to children in the United States every year. Research shows investments in meaningful supports for grandfamilies helps the children thrive and reduces the likelihood children will enter foster care.³



One thing that would make life better for grandfamilies and kin caregivers right now is access to consistent financial, emotional, and practical support, especially for supervised visits, mental health services, and daily living expenses. Many of us step in suddenly to care for children and shoulder all the costs, yet we are saving the system billions. Having reliable support would allow us to focus more on supporting our children heal and thrive, instead of constantly struggling to make ends meet.

- Angela Clements, Grandparent Caregiver, Wisconsin

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GRANDFAMILY AND KINSHIP CAREGIVERS' UNRECOGNIZED SUPPORT TO THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Grandfamily and kinship caregivers step forward voluntarily and at great personal sacrifice to provide a loving home to children who cannot remain with their parents. They also play a critical role in supporting our nation's child welfare system. Without these caregivers, the foster care system would be completely overwhelmed, and it would cost taxpayers **at least \$10.5 billion annually.**⁴ This is a conservative estimate based on the cost of foster care maintenance payments if just one-fourth of the children in kinship families entered the foster care system. It does not include the additional billions of associated court, administrative, case management, and oversight costs that are necessary when a state agency formally removes a child from their parents' care and places them in government custody.

Despite their contributions, the essential role of kinship caregivers goes routinely unrecognized. They are largely left without access to basic support and resources when taking on the unexpected and complex care of children who often come to them with significant mental and behavioral health challenges, and struggle with the trauma of losing or being separated from their parent(s).

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It was not easy for my grandmother to raise a child with serious needs while she was in her early 60s with little support. We need more support for grandparents like her who step up to care for us.

– Shaheed M. Morris, Raised in a Grandfamily, New Jersey

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CAREGIVING COMES AT A COST

Most grandparents or other kin caregivers who step forward to provide full-time care for children receive little government support, and they do so at great cost to themselves.⁵ Caregivers frequently step into the role with little to no warning and are living on fixed incomes. They often sacrifice their retirement savings and financial well-being, leaving them without resources to provide for themselves in their later years.

There is also a cost to caregivers' health. Focusing on the needs of the children, they often ignore their own physical and mental health which can lead to chronic stress, depression, and physical illnesses such as hypertension.⁶ This can result in them being more likely to require costly supports and services later in life. Grandfamily caregivers report experiencing feelings of social isolation, stigma, grief, and loss while trying to meet the complex behavioral, mental, and physical health needs of children who have experienced trauma before coming into their care.⁷

Because they have kept the children out of foster care, kin caregivers are often disconnected from systems of support for themselves and the children. They face numerous challenges accessing critical help like financial and legal assistance, affordable housing, health care, mental health resources, child care, respite, and food and nutrition assistance. Where assistance is available, applications and services are often designed for parents or foster families rather than grandfamilies, creating additional barriers to effective help. Grandfamilies and kinship families need improved access, increased availability, and services tailored to their unique circumstances.

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I have never felt heard, seen, or supported in any program. Overlooked and dismissed over and over. Why? Because our grandson had us, why would we need support? He was not an extreme and he was not in danger... We saw to his needs the best we could. Now that he is 18, the system is not there for him again. The school ignored his behaviors thinking it was just defiance. Healthcare would not help us diagnose him. Government saw us as being financially capable because we had an income.

– Gail Engel, Grandparent Caregiver, Colorado

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IMPROVED SUPPORTS AND SERVICES FOR KIN AND GRANDFAMILIES BENEFITS CHILDREN, CAREGIVERS, AND OUR ECONOMY

When grandfamilies get the support they need, children thrive in the care of kin. Compared to children raised in foster care by non-relatives, children in foster care raised by relatives have better mental and behavioral health outcomes, do better academically, have stronger stability, and higher levels of permanency.⁸ Children in kinship foster care typically get access to financial assistance, supports, and services similar to those offered to non-kin foster parents. In contrast, children raised by kin who step forward to keep them out of foster care are often left with little to no support. Investing in additional supports and services for kinship families who care for children outside of foster care will help the children and caregivers flourish while preventing the need for more costly foster care services.

Research shows that the social, behavioral, and mental health outcomes for children in grandfamilies are better when families receive supportive services than for those who do not.⁹ Children in grandfamilies who do not get access to supportive services are at increased risk of entering or re-entering foster care compared to those who receive services.¹⁰ The caregivers who receive supportive services also benefit. They have better mental and emotional health, reduced distress, and decreased feelings of isolation.¹¹

Despite data on the importance of services for kinship families, their unique needs are often overlooked. Available services and benefits for children and families are usually geared toward parents and are not designed with kinship families in mind. Grandfamily and kin caregivers are often unaware of the resources that do exist. For some families who come to the attention of the child welfare system, the structure and support that comes with formal kinship foster care may be an important option for them, but families are often uninformed of the benefits available through foster care, fearful of the system or steered away from foster care by caseworkers.

Annual Costs of Foster Care:

Did you know that researchers estimate the average annual investment to support a child in foster care is between \$32,711 and \$65,422?¹² This includes government expenditure on child's medical needs, court costs, foster care maintenance costs, and administrative costs of the agency overseeing the child's removal and placement, including caseworker salary.

The vast majority of kinship families are raising children outside of foster care with little to no government help. Providing support for kinship families to care for children, improves outcomes for children and reduces the likelihood that children will enter foster care with nonrelatives.

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Caring for my granddaughter full-time in kinship care is both a blessing and a challenge. With many therapy appointments and daily needs, the financial strain continues to grow. On average, I spend an extra \$1000 in expenses every month on gas to get to appointments and school, personal care and hygiene needs, and groceries. Afterschool programs, school field trips add even more expenses that quickly add up. I am not eligible for food stamps, which makes it even harder to make ends meet. Caring for a loved one in kinship care is costly, and as a grandmother, I do my best to provide, but the rising cost of living makes it very difficult.

- Angela Clements, Grandparent Caregiver, Wisconsin

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Child welfare systems must do a better job informing kinship families about the differences in benefits and support for children inside and outside the foster care system.

While formal foster care may be best for some kinship families, the vast majority of kinship caregivers will raise children outside of the foster care system. Those families face barriers to accessing resources if they don't have legal guardianship of the child, don't meet eligibility requirements designed for parent-headed families, or lack access to the child's social security card or other required paperwork. Examples of challenges include qualifying for financial assistance, obtaining food and nutrition assistance, finding affordable housing for their intergenerational family, securing health care and necessary vaccines, or getting community-based supports for themselves and the children.

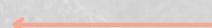
Grandfamilies will experience more challenges due to recent cuts, work and documentation requirements, and other changes to Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other federal programs.

Grandparents and other relatives have stepped forward at great personal cost to wrap children in the protective cocoon of family and prop up an overburdened foster care system. We must protect the few supports and services available to kin caregivers and invest in improvements to ensure they are given critical assistance to help children thrive. This will result in more productive adults and fewer long-term costs that will ultimately benefit children, families, communities, and the broader economy.

Ensure Opioid Settlement Funds Support Grandfamilies:

Did you know that the states with the highest percentages of grandparents raising grandchildren are also the states with the highest opioid prescribing rates?¹³ More than a third of children placed in foster care because of parental substance use are placed with relatives.¹⁴ States are making decisions now about how to use opioid settlement funds, yet grandfamilies are often left behind.

[Learn how to advocate with opioid settlement decisionmakers to include grandfamilies.](#)



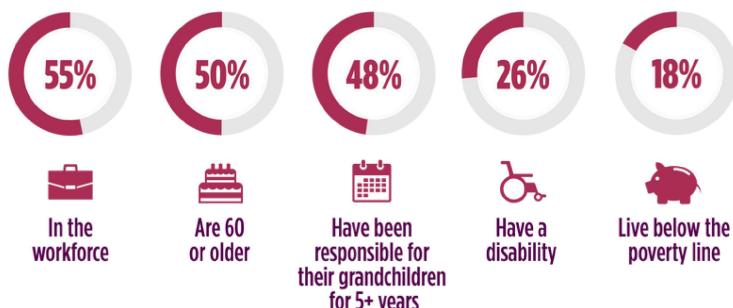


children are being raised by a relative or close family friend and do not have a parent living in the household.¹⁵



\$10.5 BILLION

Without grandparent and other kin caregivers, the foster care system would be totally overwhelmed, and it would cost taxpayers at least \$10.5 billion annually in foster care payments alone.¹⁷



CHILDREN THRIVE IN GRANDFAMILIES & KINSHIP FAMILIES¹⁹



2+ MILLION

Grandparents are responsible for caring for their grandchildren living with them.¹⁸

PROTECT AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO CRITICAL SUPPORTS FOR KINSHIP FAMILIES



Kinship Navigators & Community Based Supports:

Legal Assistance, Child Care, Respite, Supports Groups/Mental Health, Housing

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION



Ensure continued access to critical benefits that meet basic needs for kinship/grandfamilies including food, nutrition, and health care by reversing cuts to Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/Food Stamps), and preserving Medicare.



Protect and improve access and adequacy of financial supports including Social Security and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for kinship/grandfamilies outside of the child welfare system such as by increasing TANF child-only grant amounts, addressing barriers related to TANF child support collection requirements, improving outreach and application processes, allowing dependent children of grandparents or other relatives who have legal custody of them to qualify for Social Security benefits, restoring the Social Security student benefit, and ensuring adequate staffing at the Social Security Administration to administer benefits to families.

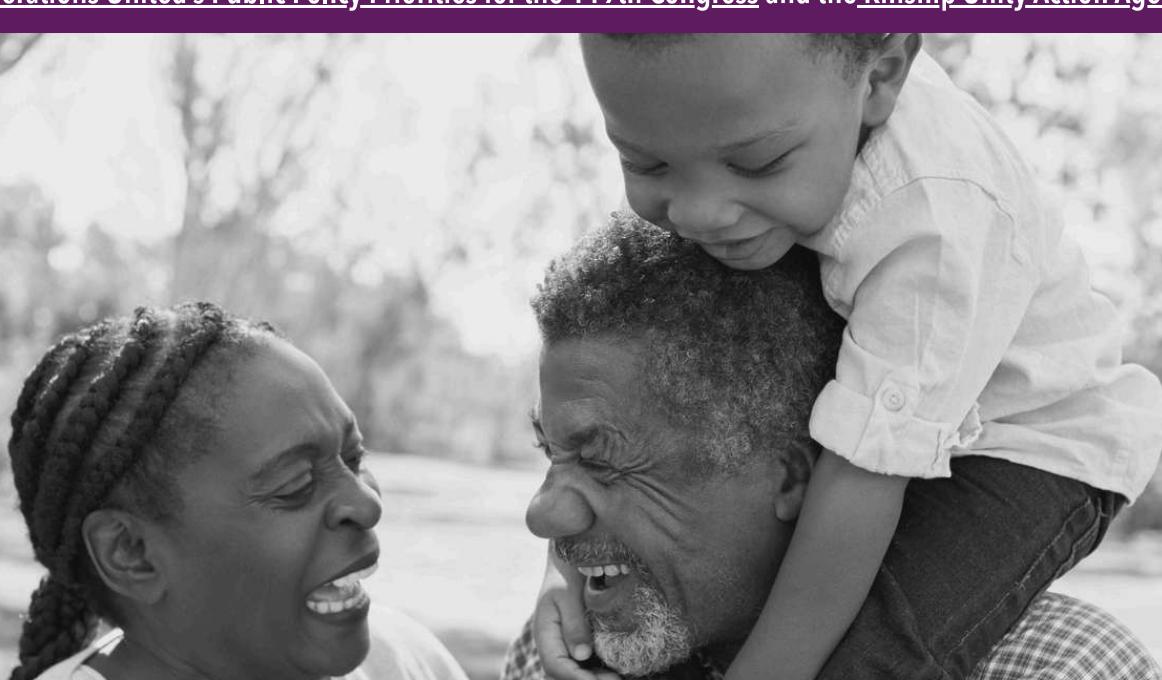


Increase supportive services and tailor programs for kinship/grandfamilies outside of foster care, such as kinship navigators, support groups, educational supports, respite care, juvenile justice resources, mental health, housing, and legal services. Consider leveraging Social Services Block Grant, National Family Caregiver Support Program, Native American Caregiver Support Program, and other federal, state, and local funding sources.



Increase information and access to kinship foster care for families involved with the child welfare system by implementing kin-specific foster care approval standards, and requiring caseworkers placing children with kin to educate caregivers about their care arrangement options and the differences in benefits available inside and outside of foster care.

For more detailed recommendations and further information about how to support grandfamilies and kinship families, visit [Generations United's Public Policy Priorities for the 119th Congress](#) and the [Kinship Unity Action Agenda](#).



STATE DATA: CHILDREN IN KINSHIP CARE (GRANDFAMILIES)

State	% of All Children in Kinship Care (Grandfamilies) 2023-2025 ²⁰	# of All Children in Kinship Care (Grandfamilies) 2023-2025 ²¹	% of Children in Foster Care Who Are in Kinship Care (Grandfamilies) 2024 ²²	# of Children in Foster Care Who Are in Kinship Care (Grandfamilies) 2024 ²³
Alabama	4%	47,000	16%	945
Alaska	3%	6,000	46%	1,084
Arizona	4%	57,000	49%	4,438
Arkansas	6%	40,000	31%	1,074
California	4%	321,000	38%	14,755
Colorado	3%	39,000	37%	1,430
Connecticut	2%	14,000	43%	1,384
Delaware	3%	6,000	19%	100
District of Columbia	4%	6,000	22%	118
Florida	4%	159,000	51%	8,680
Georgia	4%	89,000	22%	2,362
Hawaii	5%	15,000	7%	71
Idaho	2%	9,000	28%	357
Illinois	3%	71,000	57%	10,534
Indiana	4%	63,000	56%	6,647
Iowa	1%	10,000	50%	1,879
Kansas	3%	21,000	44%	2,685
Kentucky	6%	59,000	13%	1,093
Louisiana	4%	45,000	43%	1,889
Maine	4%	10,000	44%	1,075
Maryland	4%	54,000	23%	836
Massachusetts	3%	44,000	37%	3,180
Michigan	3%	64,000	49%	4,753
Minnesota	2%	28,000	45%	2,641
Mississippi	9%	58,000	38%	1,503
Missouri	2%	34,000	49%	5,721
Montana	3%	7,000	44%	967
Nebraska	1%	4,000	44%	1,597
Nevada	4%	28,000	42%	1,648
New Hampshire	4%	10,000	35%	412
New Jersey	2%	49,000	50%	1,395
New Mexico	8%	37,000	41%	914
New York	3%	123,000	37%	5,502
North Carolina	4%	90,000	32%	3,414

State	% of All Children in Kinship Care (Grandfamilies) 2023-2025 ²⁰	# of All Children in Kinship Care (Grandfamilies) 2023-2025 ²¹	% of Children in Foster Care Who Are in Kinship Care (Grandfamilies) 2024 ²²	# of Children in Foster Care Who Are in Kinship Care (Grandfamilies) 2024 ²³
North Dakota	3%	6,000	33%	377
Ohio	4%	100,000	31%	4,394
Oklahoma	5%	48,000	46%	2,809
Oregon	2%	18,000	41%	1,797
Pennsylvania	2%	63,000	38%	4,283
Rhode Island	2%	4,000	40%	659
South Carolina	6%	74,000	27%	907
South Dakota	4%	8,000	32%	532
Tennessee	4%	56,000	11%	1,035
Texas	4%	287,000	36%	5,373
Utah	2%	15,000	35%	590
Vermont	3%	3,000	35%	313
Virginia	4%	74,000	17%	884
Washington	3%	42,000	Did not submit data	Did not submit data
West Virginia	6%	21,000	48%	3,152
Wisconsin	2%	25,000	41%	2,428
Wyoming	3%	4,000	Did not submit data	Did not submit data



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ABOUT GENERATIONS UNITED

Founded in 1986, Generations United's mission is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all. Its National Center on Grandfamilies is the leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives, and close family friends, guided by GRAND Voices, a national network of caregiver advocates. The Center convenes caregivers and organizations to set the national agenda, leads federal advocacy, provides training and technical assistance, and elevates kinship/grandfamilies' voices to improve policies and practices that affect them. It also raises awareness through media outreach, communications, and events, and produces the annual State of Grandfamilies & Kinship Care Report along with a wide range of guides, fact sheets, and tools on education, health care, financial, and legal supports. Generations United also operates the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, the only federally supported national technical assistance center on kinship families. Learn more at gu.org, grandfamilies.org, and www.gksnetwork.org.



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