

2015

THE STATE OF GRANDFAMILIES IN AMERICA



**generations
united**
Because we're stronger together®

Grandfamilies or kinship families are families in which children reside with and are being raised by grandparents, other extended family members, and adults with whom they have a close family-like relationship, such as godparents and close family friends.

photo courtesy of Children's Defense Fund



Introduction

Children do best in families. When children cannot remain with their parents, the comfort of a grandparent, aunt or cousin eases the trauma of separation. Compared to children in non-relative care, children being raised by relatives have more stability, are more likely to maintain connections with brothers and sisters, and preserve their cultural heritage and community bonds. Despite growing recognition that keeping

children with relatives improves their outcomes, many federal and state policies present barriers to prioritizing and supporting relatives raising children.

In this second edition of the annual State of Grandfamilies in America report, Generations United identified key state laws and policies specifically designed to address barriers and better support the diverse and unique population of

grandparents and other relatives raising children. We evaluated all 50 states and the District of Columbia based on the availability of these laws and policies. Our goal is to elevate top states in key areas and encourage policymakers, advocates and leaders in those and all states to do more to support grandfamilies.

Key Findings

To identify states with the most promising laws and policies to support grandfamilies, Generations United used the following criteria: percentage of children in foster care who are placed with relatives, education and health care consent laws, de facto custody laws, policies that eliminate barriers to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and opt-ins to the following federal programs: National Family Caregiver Support

Program (NFCSP), Guardian Assistance Program (GAP), and Lifespan Respite. The states were then given an overall rating based on point values for each law and policy. Knowing that grandfamilies are very diverse and different policies support different types of grandfamilies, we largely weighed the laws and policies equally.

BASED ON THIS FRAMEWORK, THE STUDY FOUND THE FOLLOWING:

- The top 10 states with grandfamily-friendly laws and policies are California, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Montana, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Texas, and Washington. These states met more than half of our criteria.
- Only four states secured a passing grade (above 60%).
- All states had at least one grandfamily-friendly law or policy.
- No state scored 100% and had all of the laws and policies.
- Almost 65% of children in grandfamilies live in states with 50% or less of the laws and policies.¹
- Compared to previous years, on average states are doing a better job placing children with relatives when they must enter foster care.
 - ▶ *Nationally the number of children placed with relatives when they are in foster care increased from 24% in 2008 to 28% in 2013.*
 - ▶ *10 states have increased this number by at least 10%: Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, and Wyoming.*²



The study made clear that despite progress, most states still have a long way to go to ensure a comprehensive set of supports for grandfamilies. Additionally, crucial supportive programs such as kinship navigators, legal services, and housing exist only in small pockets of the country. While some states had individual laws and policies, no state demonstrates a strong, comprehensive overall framework of key supports needed to ensure all children and caregivers in grandfamilies get the support they need to succeed and thrive.

Who are Grandfamilies?

For the purposes of this report grandfamilies are families where grandparents or other relatives step forward to raise children when parents are unable to care for them. Sometimes a parent is still living in the household but not providing for most of the basic needs of a child, such as a teen parent. In other instances, grandparents receive a call in the middle of the night from child protective services and become full-time, sole caregivers to their grandchildren in a matter of hours. While grandparents are more often the relative that steps in, these scenarios also play out with aunts, uncles, older siblings, and even close family friends.

Grandfamilies are diverse and come together for a variety of reasons—including parental job loss, out of state employment, military deployment, divorce, deportation, illness, death, substance abuse, incarceration, or mental illness. Grandfamilies live in every area in the country, and represent all income levels, all races, and all ethnicities.

Grandparents or other relatives often take on the care of children with little or no chance to plan in advance. Consequently, they typically face unique challenges. Many caregivers lack a legal relationship to the children and cannot access educational enrollment, school services, immunizations or health care on their behalf. Others may have a legal

relationship, but taking on sudden caregiving responsibilities often means they do not have suitable housing. Many caregivers are in their prime retirement savings years and rather than continuing to save, they find themselves providing for their grandchildren. For retired caregivers living on a fixed income, they may not have the finances to take on the many extra expenses of raising children.



7.8 million children live in grandfamilies, where grandparents or other relatives are the householders.³

Supportive Policies for Grandfamilies

A comprehensive package of supportive state laws and policies is required to meet the diverse and unique needs and circumstances of grandfamilies. This report examines and ranks which states have the following laws and policies specifically designed to support grandfamilies:

- **education and health care consent laws**
- **de facto custody laws**
- **policies that eliminate barriers to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**
- **opt-ins to the following federal programs: National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP), Guardian Assistance Program (GAP), and Lifespan Respite.**

We also use one additional criterion, which is our only outcome based criterion. It focuses on the percentage of children in foster care who are placed with relatives. This tells us which states are doing a better job of prioritizing relatives and supporting the many benefits to children of living with relatives.

No single law or policy among our criteria will benefit every child in a grandfamily. For example, children being raised outside of the foster care system may benefit only from a health care consent law or supportive TANF policy while children raised in foster care with relatives may benefit most from a Guardianship Assistance Program.

It is important to note that there are many additional federal and state programs critical to grandfamilies, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, and Medicare. Tax credits, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), can also be important sources of support. We do not assess the states based on these federal programs or credits, because they are available in every state and tend to not have as many state-level variations as TANF, the NFCSP, Lifespan Respite or GAP.

Critical community-based programs such as housing, legal services, kinships navigators, and support groups have produced many positive outcomes for children, caregivers and the families as a whole, but are also not part of our assessment criteria. Research confirms that these types of programs can reduce costs, increase permanency and stability for children and youth, result in fewer days in child welfare custody, lower rates of foster care re-entry, reduce behavioral problems of children and youth, and increase caregiver strengths.⁴ We do not assess the states based on these programs, because they tend to be limited to only certain parts of a state, if they exist at all. However, we affirm their importance, and have highlighted several of these critical programs throughout the report.

The Only Safe Place He Had

As a line lead for his job in the mobile canning and bottling industry, the farthest Chad Dingle has ever traveled is about five hours from his Oregon home. But, in life, he has traveled more than any 23-year-old should ever have to go.

With his mother and father trapped in alcoholism and drug abuse, Dingle spent infancy and his toddler years neglected and abused – memories that only came back in nightmares – until his grandmother could get full custody when he was 3 and she and her newly-wed husband could adopt him when he was 4, diagnosed with something not a lot of people knew about at the time: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

“One thing I’ve noticed is that most people go to grandma’s house and get spoiled,” Dingle said. “But for me, it was the only safe place I had. I never liked going back to my parents’ house. Getting to live with grandma was like ‘going to grandma’s house’ all the time. I had more love there than anywhere else in my life.”

The journey toward wholeness continued through the PTSD, bullying from other children, anger, depression, cutting, suicidal thoughts and much more. “It was a tough position (for my grandmother) to be in. She wasn’t my mom, but she was. She dropped everything, including a good job, and became a stay-at-home mom for me – everything to provide the safest home for me.”

The years of learning how to navigate the complex legal, emotional, financial and physical issues have resulted in three books written to help families in similar situations. In her book, *Second Time Around: Help for Grandparents Who Raise their Children’s Kids*, Dingle’s mom, Joan, stressed the critical role that quality, professional counseling and support services play in helping grandfamilies succeed and thrive. Together, Dingle and his mom wrote *Addiction & Families* and the just-released *Raising Children of Alcoholics & Drug Users*.

“It took me a long time because I was a rebel as a kid,” Dingle said. “I couldn’t wrap my head around the fact that (my mom/ grandmother) did save my life. She is the strongest woman I’ve ever known. I’m a complete mama’s boy. I know where my half siblings are now – really messed up – and that could have been me.”

Today, Dingle still grapples with residual matters. For example, he said he contacted his birth father two years ago and is still trying to figure out whether he wants him in his life. “It’s been a lot,” Dingle reflected.

Yet, any miles he travels will now include his wife. “We were high school sweethearts – went to separate high schools and had about five or six years when we hardly ever saw each other,” Dingle said. And, they will include the couple’s baby, expected with great excitement this year.

“Family doesn’t have to be blood. It really comes down to the relationships you can have,” Dingle said. “Whoever loves you, and you love, is your family.”

For more information about Chad Dingle and Joan Callander Dingle, including their books, **visit <http://addictskids.com>**.



1 in 10
grandparents live with
their grandchildren⁵

More Than a House: A Community for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

In the Bronx borough of New York City, an apartment building rises above the streets, safely housing grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, giving all of them – young and old – a supportive community where they can nurture a positive family future.

The Grandparent Family Apartments building – a joint venture of PSS and the West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing – has pioneered a successful model that draws attention from around the world.

"Primarily, these are situations where the grandparents have really stepped up and taken on an enormous responsibility," said PSS Executive Director Rimas J. Jasin. "They don't have the income or, often, the physical resources. But, family is important to them, and they've made the commitment to do what they can."

The 50-unit building opened in 2005, after years of planning and intermediary measures to help the suddenly increasing number of lower-income grandparents who took custody of their grandchildren during the crack cocaine and AIDS epidemic of the 1990s. Whether in senior-only housing or in homes that became too small overnight, these grandparents needed to move.

Jasin said everyone involved understood that the adults and the children needed shelter and much more. "That's why we built more than an apartment. We made sure, through the PSS Kinship Program, that there is a supportive environment with social services, skill building workshops, programming for the kids, counseling, intergenerational activities, etc."

"That's the one big difference between our building and other similar buildings: It's a real community, and we have staff on site who foster that value," Jasin said. Our families know they're part of something special, and they're proud of that. Plus, we've grown together over the last 10 years, learning from each other, so there is that dynamic of community and an expectation for people to be supporting members of that community."

About 60 grandparents and 100 grandchildren live in the Grandparent Family Apartments. One measure of success is that last year, more than 90 percent of the children progressed to their next grade in school.

Jasin noted, "Putting into words why this place is great is hard. We're able to help them navigate systems and situations, the grandparents support one another and, in the end, these kids have a much better chance than they would have on their own."

Children fare well in the care of their relatives. Compared to children in non-relative care, children being raised by relatives have more stability, are more likely to maintain connections with brothers and sisters and preserve their cultural heritage and community bonds.





Free Los Angeles Clinic Leads Caregivers through the Legalities of Guardianship

Every Monday through Wednesday, two attorneys and a handful of volunteers go to the courthouse in downtown Los Angeles to help as many as 50 people who line up each day, a majority of them wanting guardianship over children whose parents are unable or unwilling to care for them.

This is the Pro Per Guardianship Clinic, a program of Public Counsel – the nation’s largest pro bono law firm – founded in 1970 by the Los Angeles County and Beverly Hills Bar Associations.

All of the various legal services provided at the clinic are free, explained Directing Attorney Martha Matthews, clinic Supervising Attorney Ylianna Perez-Guerrero and clinic Social Worker Beth Tsoulos.

“They’re coming to court on their own because they’re not being represented by a lawyer, and at the clinic, we first see what each person needs,” said Perez-Guerrero. With guardianships, for example, Matthews said, “It’s a whole process with paperwork for temporary, then permanent guardianship, and including notification to all relatives involved, as well as a hearing. Often, we have to explain that they are the petitioner in a legal case.”

“We don’t take sides because we’re not anyone’s lawyer,” added Perez-Guerrero. “A lot is listening to people’s sad stories – grandparents the most – and they can come into the clinic stressed and upset. There are days when we (Perez-Guerrero and staff attorney Nicole Rivera-Vazquez) prepare between 20 and 25 guardianships. It can be tough, long and emotionally draining.”

Tsoulos said, “As a social worker, I have a different connection. Caregivers are there for a legal service, but I can ask what else might be going on with the child. Everyone seems to need help applying for benefits, and I can help them explore what is available. There are a lot of families that need mental health intervention and other kinds of support, too.”

Even with the long day of waiting and going through the process – sometimes with the young children they’ve taken in – everyone agreed that the people being helped realize they can’t navigate the legal system on their own.

“By about 1 p.m., they’ve signed and filed papers. People are calm and in a much better place,” said Tsoulos. “This clinic makes a huge difference in their lives.”

Without the clinic, L.A. County would spend more money on unprepared petitioners. Caregivers would suffer more lost work time and overall income by going to court numerous times. “I think there would be more children in the foster care system,” said Tsoulos. “And, without guardianship, grandparents and other caregivers could see a child taken back into a dangerous and damaging situation,” said Matthews.

For more information, visit <http://www.publiccounsel.org>.

Policy Recommendations

Generations United recommends that states enact the grandfamily-friendly laws and policies identified in the report. In addition, federal and state policymakers should consider the following:

PRIORITIZE RELATIVES:

Encourage policies that build off evidence-informed approaches to identify, notify, prioritize and empower relatives to make informed decisions about their involvement in children's lives when the children are removed from their parents' care.

PROVIDE ACCESS TO PREVENTATIVE SERVICES:

Offer incentives and improve funding mechanisms for states to provide and coordinate preventative services to relatives outside of the formal foster care system to reduce entry into the foster care system.

ENSURE ADEQUATE SUPPORTS:

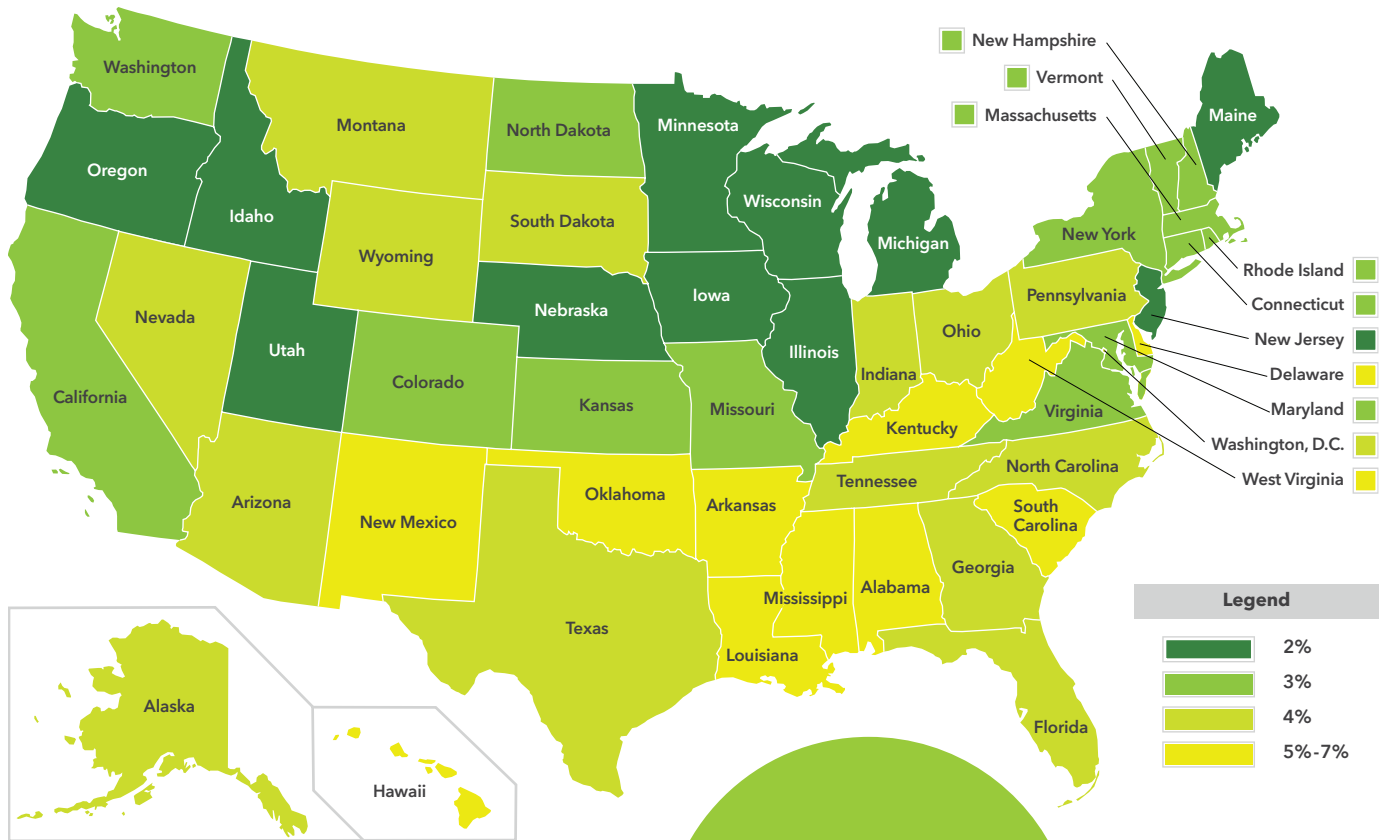
Ensure relatives caring for children with significant behavioral, mental health and other health care needs have access to adequate supportive services to keep them at home and prevent entry into congregate care settings. Strategies or achieving this recommendation include addressing barriers to foster care licensure for grandfamilies who need it and offering therapeutic foster care training to relatives.

PROMOTE TAILORED SERVICES:

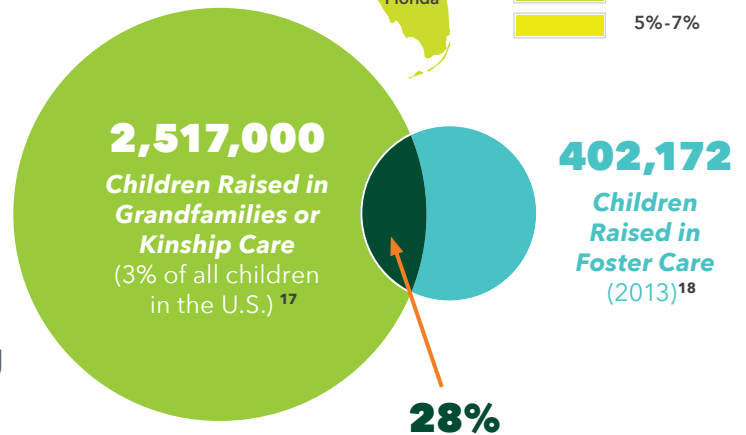
Tailor services for the unique needs of grandfamilies. Grandfamilies often need many services that are similar but not the same as those of unrelated foster parents. Services to grandfamilies both inside and outside the foster care system must consider their unique strengths and challenges, such as loyalty issues in family dynamics and the limited amount of time they may have to plan before caring for children.

State	Percent of Children in Foster Care Raised in Grandfamilies or Kinship Care ⁶	Education Consent ⁷	Health Care Consent ⁸	De Facto Custody ⁹	TANF ¹⁰				NFCSP ¹¹	GAP ¹²	Lifespan Respite ¹³
					Include adults with a family-like relationship on the grants	Has at least one work-related exemption	Has at least one time limit exemption or extension	Does not use an asset test for eligibility			
Alabama	11%							•		•	•
Alaska	21%					•	•		•	•	
Arizona	41%				•		•				•
Arkansas	16%		•			•	•			•	•
California	32%	•	•	•		•	•			•	
Colorado	20%				•	•	•	•		•	•
Connecticut	24%	•			•	•	•		•	•	
Delaware	12%	•	•		•	•	•		•		•
District of Columbia	18%			•		•	•			•	•
Florida	44%		•			•	•				•
Georgia	17%		•		•	•	•				
Hawaii	48%	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	
Idaho	29%		•	•			•			•	•
Illinois	36%					•	•	•	•	•	•
Indiana	32%		•	•		•				•	
Iowa	28%						•				•
Kansas	27%			•	•	•	•				•
Kentucky	4%	•	•	•		•	•				
Louisiana	34%	•	•	•		•	•	•		•	•
Maine	33%			•		•	•			•	
Maryland	39%	•	•			•		•		•	
Massachusetts	23%					•	•			•	•
Michigan	31%				•	•	•			•	
Minnesota	21%			•	•	•	•				
Mississippi	31%		•			•	•		•		
Missouri	26%	•	•		•	•	•			•	
Montana	43%	•	•	•			•			•	•
Nebraska	24%				•	•	•			•	•
Nevada	33%					•	•				•
New Hampshire	19%					•	•				•
New Jersey	35%	•			•	•	•			•	•
New Mexico	22%	•	•		•		•				
New York	19%		•		•	•	•			•	•
North Carolina	26%	•			•						•
North Dakota	15%		•			•	•				
Ohio	16%	•	•		•	•		•			•
Oklahoma	33%	•				•	•			•	•
Oregon	29%	•	•			•	•			•	
Pennsylvania	26%					•	•			•	•
Rhode Island	30%				•	•	•			•	•
South Carolina	6%	•	•	•		•	•		•		•
South Dakota	18%		•							•	
Tennessee	13%					•	•			•	•
Texas	33%		•		•	•	•			•	•
Utah	19%		•			•	•				
Vermont	27%				•	•	•			•	
Virginia	6%	•	•			•	•	•			•
Washington	35%		•		•	•	•			•	•
West Virginia	19%		•			•	•			•	
Wisconsin	34%				•	•				•	•
Wyoming	26%					•	•		•		

Children Being Raised in Grandfamilies¹⁴ or Kinship Care¹⁵ (2013-2015)



\$4 Billion - amount grandparents and other relatives save taxpayers each year by raising children and keeping them out of foster care¹⁶



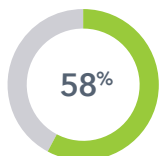
113,643 Children in Foster Care are Raised in Grandfamilies or Kinship Care (2013)¹⁹

GRANDPARENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR GRANDCHILDREN (2014)

2,631,546 Grandparents are responsible for grandchildren²⁰



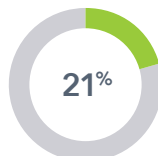
58% of them are in the workforce²¹



1,527,151



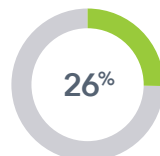
21% of them live below the poverty line²²



547,722



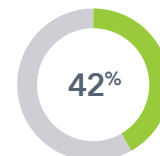
26% of them have a disability²³



671,119



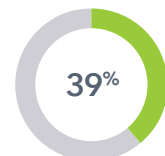
42% of them have provided care for 5 years or more²⁴



1,101,127



39% of them are over 60²⁵



1,023,862

Criteria

Relative Foster Care

Relative foster care refers to cases in which the children are placed in the legal custody of the state by a judge, and the child welfare system then places the children with grandparents or other relatives. In these situations, the child welfare agency retains legal custody, while the relatives have physical custody only.²⁶ ***Eighteen states place at least a 1/3 of the children in foster care with relatives.***

Education and Health Care Consent Laws

Education and health care consent laws allow relative caregivers who do not have a legal relationship to the children in their care to access health care on behalf of the children and enroll them in public school. Generally, both types of consent laws allow a caregiver to complete an affidavit under penalty of perjury that they are the primary caregiver of the child; then, by presenting the form, can consent to treatment, have the children receive vaccinations or enroll the children in school.²⁷ ***Seventeen states currently have education consent laws and 26 states have health care consent.***

De Facto Custody

Some states have enacted innovative de facto custody laws that essentially provide that if a relative has been raising a child for a defined period of time, the first step in proving his/her case to secure legal custody of the child is met. Then, the relative can go on to prove that he or she should be awarded legal custody, because it is in the child's best interests.²⁸ ***Twelve states have enacted de facto custody laws.***

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF provides two types of monthly financial support to help grandfamilies stay together: family grants and child-only grants. Each state determines the eligibility for its TANF program and the amount of assistance to be provided. Although TANF policy explicitly states that children cared for by relatives can receive TANF assistance, many kin families do not access it to meet the needs of children they are unexpectedly raising. Only about 12 percent of grandfamilies receive any TANF assistance, even though the majority of children being raised by kin live in poverty and qualify for the program.²⁹ TANF is an important program, because it is often the only source of financial support for grandfamilies outside the child welfare system.³⁰

Caregivers also report experiencing benefits, such as having an increased sense of purpose in life, and birth parents may value that their children remain connected to family and friends.

In evaluating the states, we looked at a number of state TANF policies that help grandfamilies access TANF. ***Seventeen states had most of the useful TANF policies that we use as assessment criteria and only two had all.***

- ***Allows adults with a family like relationship to the children to be eligible for TANF grants.***
- ***Has at least one of the work-related extensions for certain categories of kin applying for family grants - too ill to work, over age 59, needed in the home to care for an incapacitated household member or providing care to young children.***
- ***Has at least one of the time limit exemptions or extensions for certain categories of kin applying for family grants - too ill to work, over age 59, needed in the home to care for an incapacitated household member or providing care to young children.***
- ***Eliminated asset limit tests for TANF recipients, so that children can receive TANF and caregivers can have sufficient savings for retirement, a home, and education costs.***

National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP)

The NFCSP provides grants to states and territories to fund a range of supportive services that assist caregivers. The federal law states that up to ten percent of the funding appropriated for the NFCSP can be used to provide services to grandparents or relatives age 55 or older who are raising relatives' children.³¹ ***Only seven states use the full ten percent of NFCSP funds to serve grandfamilies.***

Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP)

GAP is a federal option that allows states to use Title IV-E child welfare monies to provide monthly assistance for children who exit the child welfare system into guardianships with relatives who have been their licensed caregivers. This option allows children who would otherwise languish in long-term foster care with relatives to exit into a permanent living arrangement with them.³² ***Thirty-one states, the District of Columbia, and five tribes have GAP.***

Lifespan Respite Care Program

The Lifespan Respite Care Program is funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services to implement statewide systems of coordinated, community-based respite for family caregivers of individuals with special needs of all ages.³³ ***Thirty states have Lifespan Respite Care programs or maintain services through state coalitions.***

One in four
children who live with their
grandparents are poor
(25%)³⁴

18 States

place at least a 1/3 of the children in foster care with relatives.

26 States

currently have health care consent laws and 17 states have education consent.

12 States

have enacted de facto custody laws.

17 States

had most of the useful TANF policies that we use as assessment criteria and only two had all.

Only 7 States

use the full ten percent of NFCSP funds to serve grandfamilies.

31 States

the District of Columbia, and five tribes have GAP.

30 States

have Lifespan Respite Care programs or maintain services through state coalitions.

My Grandmother: One of the Greatest People I've Ever Known

At this point in her life, Nikki Johnson-Huston has met a lot of outstanding people. She is a Philadelphia attorney with two master's degrees, an advocate for the poor, an in-demand speaker, a technology entrepreneur and much more. But without the grandmother who raised her - the grandmother who instilled in her the confidence to "be excellent" - her life might have taken a different path.

That is because when she was 2, Johnson-Huston's father left the family, her mother fell into substance abuse and her childhood saw roughly six months of moving from hotels and motels to couches and homelessness, as well as meals eaten at the mission, foster care, hand-me-down clothes and shoes that didn't fit - instability at every turn.

Then, her mother sent her to live with her grandmother - a woman born in Mississippi in 1920 who had endured her own extremely tough times, yet persevered to give her children a better life.

"I remember getting off of the Greyhound bus," Johnson-Huston said. "My grandmother hugged me and said, 'You are fortunate enough to live in the greatest country in the world, to be born to the greatest generation of women who will have ever lived up until this time. What are you going to do with this opportunity?'"

Having been out of school awhile, she faced being held back, but her grandmother insisted on an assessment. "She always talked about how much she valued education as a vehicle to empowerment. It was something that was not available to her," Johnson-Huston said. "I ended up testing gifted in math and English, and it labeled me as a smart kid. That was important, being a young black girl in those circumstances."

Even with a disability received when a car and the bus she was riding collided, her grandmother moved forward, changing her Section 8 housing voucher, applying for social services and doing everything necessary to give her granddaughter a "normal life. My grandmother got less money than a foster parent would have gotten," Johnson-Huston said. "She got the minimal food stamps and welfare. We had a more robust safety net around us because she was elderly and disabled. And, she could stretch a dime in a way my mother never could. She had age and maturity, and I got the benefit of that."

"She provided a lot of stability. There is something about living with someone who loved me from the day I was born," Johnson-Huston added. "That's why I feel so strongly about kinship care."

Ultimately, Johnson-Huston learned from her grandmother that morals, character and hard work were much more important than being poor. "My grandmother had a sense of optimism, strength, grace and elegance that far transcended her economic status. She also taught me a sense of gratitude, that there will always be someone who has less than us, and we can help them."

Johnson-Huston said, "I was 21 when she passed, and on our last weekend together, she said, 'I am so proud of the woman you've become.' She believed I was going to do something fantastic in my life, for myself and for others. She left me a healthy, happy, functional adult." And by achieving and giving back to others via the confidence her grandmother imparted, Johnson-Huston said, "No family deserves to go through what we did, but I've found a way for all of that to have meaning. I've realized your life can be something more."

Methodology

Once Generations United identified laws and policies that were crafted to reflect the unique challenges grandfamilies face, we researched and compiled information on which states had them. We included the District of Columbia in this analysis, but did not include U.S. territories and tribes. The sources for all of the data are included in the endnotes. We assigned point values for each law and policy. Knowing that grandfamilies are very diverse and different policies support different types of grandfamilies, we largely weighed the laws and policies equally. Four points were given to a state for having GAP, De Facto Custody, Lifespan Respite, Consent laws (2 for education consent and 2 for health care consent) and for using more than 9.5% of NFCSP for grandfamilies. We scored states on the percentage of children in relative foster care on a scale of zero to eight points (8=45% or higher; 7=40-44%; 6=35-39%; 5= 30-34%; 4= 25-29%; 3= 20 - 24%; 2=15-19%; 1=10-14%; 0=below 10%). Recognizing the importance of this criterion, which is the only one to measure outcomes, rather than policy, we precluded any state from our top rating if they scored a zero on this item. Finally we gave states one point for each of the supportive TANF policies they implemented up to 4.

Limitations

This report evaluates states based on the existence of laws and policies trending across states that are specifically designed to support grandfamilies. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of supportive grandfamilies' laws and policies. With the exception of the criteria measuring the number of children in foster care with relatives, states were not evaluated on outcomes, the degree to which policies were effectively implemented and accessed, or the availability of supportive community-based programs. Further research should explore criteria in these areas to fully assess each state's support for grandfamilies. Additionally, further research is needed to assess the availability of supportive laws and policies for grandfamilies in tribes and U.S. territories.

Conclusion

Our nation benefits tremendously from the sacrifices grandfamilies make to keep their families intact. From athletes and celebrities to business leaders, from recent college graduates to the President of the United States, individuals raised in grandfamilies contribute immeasurably to the health and welfare of our nation. We invite you to join us and work to improve federal and state laws and policies to better recognize, support and honor these important families.

Resources

Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies is a leading voice for issues affecting families headed by grandparents and other relatives. www.gu.org.

The Grandfamilies State Law and Policy Resource Center serves as a national legal resource in support of grandfamilies within and outside the child welfare system. www.grandfamilies.org

GrandFacts are state fact sheets for grandfamilies that provide state-specific data, information and helpful links. www.grandfactsheets.org.

Advocates for Families First works to build a unified national movement in support of kinship, foster, and adoptive families who care for children and youth. www.advocatesforfamiliesfirst.org

The National Indian Child Welfare Association works to support the safety, health, and spiritual strength of Native children along the broad continuum of their lives. www.nicwa.org

The Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP) is a major initiative of The Brookdale Foundation Group that promotes the creation or expansion of services for grandfamilies. www.brookdalefoundation.org

When Grandparents Suddenly Become Parents Again, Kinship Caregiver is There to Help

It doesn't matter what brings them to the door. Kinship Navigator Lynn Urvina, from Family Education and Support Services, knows that when people walk into her office, they need someone to listen to them and they need immediate help.

Usually, they are grandparents, suddenly raising grandchildren whose parents are unable to care for them. They are outside of the formal child welfare system and may or may not have custody of the children in their care. They are trying to stretch dollars, spaces and time to keep their family together.

Urvina is one of several navigators with Washington state's Kinship Caregiver Support Program (KCSP) who annually connects roughly 2,200 relatives raising 3,300 children in the counties she serves with legal resources; support groups; training opportunities, such as parenting classes; social services and limited funds that can help lead them through this often challenging situation.

"One of the things you hear over and over again is the overwhelming confusion and emotion at the beginning," Urvina said. "They're wondering if this is for a month or two or for the rest of their lives. What grandmother has extra beds for the three grandchildren who show up? It's not easy."

Urvina continued, "The other thing I see a lot are people really struggling with the fact that their children are not capable of parenting - whatever the reason. They feel helpless, and they feel like they've failed. We can connect them with counseling, but I also encourage them to come to a support group and listen to people who have made it over that hump. And, it doesn't cost them anything except to show up."

The funds Urvina can offer caregivers must fall into specific categories because KCSP is a state program. She said money typically is needed for food, diapers, cribs/beds, utility bills, auto repairs and gas cards.

And, while it can be tough trying to cover three of Washington's far-flung counties, Urvina said, "I love what I do. If I can help a family calm down and create a loving environment for the children, it's worth it. This is important work, and I know I've made a difference in some of these people's lives."

For more information, visit <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/home-and-community-services-kinship-care/kinship-care>.



Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies is a leading voice for issues affecting families headed by grandparents and other relatives. Through the Center, Generations United leads an advisory group of organizations, caregivers and youth that set the national agenda to advance public will in support of these families. Center staff conduct federal advocacy and provide technical assistance to state level practitioners and advocates and trains grandfamilies to advocate for themselves. The Center raises awareness about the strengths and needs of the families through media outreach, weekly communications, and awareness raising events. It offers a broad range of guides, fact sheets and tools for grandfamilies, which cover issues from educational and health care access to financial and legal supports and can be found at www.gu.org.

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END NOTES:

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14. **Grandfamilies** is often the term used to describe these families. Other terms include kinship care, relative care, and grandparent-headed households.

15. Annie E. Casey Foundation uses the following definition of Kinship Care for their data: *Children in kinship care is derived from the relationship to householder items on the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Children are considered to be in kinship care when all of the following conditions are true: a parent is not present in the household; the child is not a foster child to the householder; the child is not a housemate/ roommate / border with no relatives in the household; the child is not a householder; and the child is not a spouse or unmarried partner of the householder. The analysis excludes group quarters population.*
16. Generations United calculated this figure based on the federal share of the 2011 national average minimum monthly foster care maintenance payment (\$301) for 1.1 million children. The number of children is approximately one-half of the children being raised in grandfamilies outside of the formal foster care system. We use this number in our calculation due to a conservative estimate that the other half already receives some type of governmental financial assistance, such as a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) child-only grant. We also know that a number of children in grandfamilies have special needs that would warrant higher monthly foster care maintenance payments. The cost of 1.1 million children entering the system would represent all new financial outlays for taxpayers.
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