

2020-2021 Legislative Budget Request Recommendation: Kinship Navigator Program Funding

In order to serve the needs of the 250,000 Texas children being raised by grandparents and other relatives, as part of its 2020-2021 Legislative Appropriation Request HHSC should include funding to establish a Kinship Navigator Program using both federal and state funds in the amounts:

- **\$500,000 in Federal Funds 2020**
- **\$200,000 in General Revenue 2021**
- **\$200,000 in Federal Funds 2021**

Need for a Kinship Navigator Program in Texas

There are an estimated 250,000 children in Texas in informal kinship placements - living with grandparents or other relatives with no parent in the home and without the involvement of the Department of Family and Protective Services. These kinship placements provide love and stability to these children and keep them out of state custody which saves Texas taxpayer millions of dollars every year in foster care costs. Yet grandparents and other kinship caregivers often experience significant financial, health and social hardships when they suddenly take on the responsibility of caring for their young relatives.

Many kinship caregivers, especially grandparents, are not aware of the benefit programs for which they are eligible or how to access them. Outreach targeted at kinship caregivers from the administrative agencies in Texas is extremely limited. For example, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), which administers TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid, currently performs very little outreach specifically aimed at kinship care families to inform them of their eligibility for particular programs. Additionally, if a kinship caregiver does apply for assistance from a state-administered program, according to agency representatives, state eligibility staff do not necessarily inform them or encourage them to apply for other programs for which they may be eligible. This lack of information leads to families struggling to provide a stable household for the children in their care. To meet the needs of kinship families, HHSC should establish a Kinship Navigator program.

Definition of Kinship Navigator Programs

There are many definitions, but kinship navigator programs are essentially initiatives that provide information, referral, and follow-up services to grandparents and other relatives raising children to link them to the benefits and services that they or the children need. Kinship navigator programs also sensitize agencies and providers to the needs of relative-headed families.

Federal Funding Opportunities for Kinship Navigator Programs

As of October 1, 2018, thanks to the [Family First Prevention Services Act \(Family First\)](#), states can receive federal reimbursement for up to 50% of their expenditures to provide kinship navigator programs that meet certain evidence-based requirements of promising, supported or well-supported practices. This federal support is available regardless of whether the children for whom the services are being accessed meet certain income eligibility requirements for Title IV-E foster care funding.

To help states obtain this federal reimbursement, as part of the [Omnibus budget](#) that was signed into law on March 23, 2018, \$20 million will go to states, U.S. territories and tribes to develop and evaluate kinship navigator programs. The intent of this money is to help develop navigator programs in states and localities that

do not have them and to help existing programs get the evaluation they need or adapt their programs to meet the evidence-based standards in the Family First Act. Because of Family First, once they meet these standards they will be able to draw down ongoing federal funding from Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.

The Definition and Requirements of Kinship Navigator Programs under Federal Law

Federal law defines kinship navigator programs as programs to assist kinship caregivers in learning about, finding, and using programs and services to meet the needs of the children they are raising and their own needs, and promote effective partnerships among public and private agencies to ensure kinship caregiver families are served. 42 U.S.C. 627.

The law goes on to specify that kinship navigator programs must meet the following requirements in order to receive federal funding support:

- Kinship navigator programs must be coordinated with other State or local agencies that promote service coordination or provide information and referral services, including the entities that provide 2–1–1 or 3–1–1 information systems where available, to avoid duplication or fragmentation of services to kinship care families.
- Must be planned and operated in consultation with kinship caregivers and organizations representing them, youth raised by kinship caregivers, relevant government agencies, and relevant community-based or faith-based organizations.
- Must establish information and referral systems that link (via toll-free access) kinship caregivers, kinship support group facilitators, and kinship service providers:
 - to each other;
 - eligibility and enrollment information for Federal, State, and local benefits;
 - relevant training to assist kinship caregivers in caregiving and in obtaining benefits and services; and
 - relevant legal assistance and help in obtaining legal services.
- Must provide outreach to kinship care families, including by establishing, distributing, and updating a kinship care website, or other relevant guides or outreach materials.
- Must promote partnerships between public and private agencies, including schools, community based or faith-based organizations, and relevant government agencies, to increase their knowledge of the needs of kinship care families to promote better services for those families.
- Under federal law, these programs may also establish and support a kinship care ombudsman with authority to intervene and help kinship caregivers access services; and support any other activities designed to assist kinship caregivers in obtaining benefits and services to improve their caregiving.

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