



Ohio Grandparent/ Kinship Coalition

**Ohio's Statewide Kinship Navigator
"Since 1998"**

Where Your Voice is Heard!

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Testimony on H.B. 96

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony today on H.B. 96.

My name is Barbara Turpin, and I am a board member of and represent: the Ohio Grandparent Kinship Coalition, the statewide advocacy organization for and comprised of kinship caregivers; board chair of the Ohio Federation for Health Equity and Social Justice; Kinship Care coalition members: Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition and Organize Ohio. I am advocating for the provision of support for kinship families in the H.B. 96 budget. Kinship care is a temporary or permanent arrangement in which a relative or non-relative adult assumes full-time care of a child whose parents are unwilling or unable to care for them. Kinship care includes relationships established through an informal arrangement, legal custody or guardianship order, Power of Attorney, relative or non-relative foster care placement, or kinship adoption. Formal kinship arrangements are families who are involved with the child welfare system; approximately 4,000 statewide. Informal kinship arrangements make up most of the kinship families (200,000+ relatives and non-relatives) who are not involved with the child welfare system. Studies have shown that kinship care is the best option for a child who cannot remain with their parent.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey, Ohio's relative (ACS does not capture the thousands of non-grandparent relative caregivers or the non-relative caregiver population) kinship caregiver population numbers are:

- 297,000 children live in relative caregiver homes
- 189,000 children live with grandparents
- 86,000 children live with grandparents solely responsible for their care
- 45,000 grandparents have cared for their grandchildren for 5 years or more

H.B. 96 includes the following financial support per program and per budget year for:

- Ohio Kinship Adoption Navigator which does not provide direct financial support to kinship caregivers: \$8.5M
- Wendy's Wonderful Kids Adoption program: \$10M
- Adoption Grants for adoptive parents of Ohio children, out-of-state children, and children from foreign countries: \$34M

- Kinship Support Program only to formal kinship caregivers in the child welfare system who become licensed foster parents: \$10M
- Kinship Permanency Incentive Program (KPIP) only to formal kinship caregivers involved with the child welfare system who take custody: \$6M
- Adoption Services: \$23,992,000
- Adoption program: \$215M

There are few resources in H.B. 96 allocated to the support of informal kinship families. These families are currently eligible to receive:

- TANF Ohio Works First (OWF) “Child Only” monthly cash assistance payment which is not based on the income of the caregiver i.e., payments for 2024: \$363 - one child; \$495 – 2 children; \$608 – 3 children; \$749 – 4children etc. The payments are incremental, not equal per child. It costs just as much to raise additional children as it does one child.
- Food stamps based on the caregiver’s income
- Child care based on the caregiver’s income
- Medicaid coverage for the child is not based on the caregiver’s income

In addition to the important daily contributions and sacrifices kinship caregivers make by providing a loving, safe and stable home to children who would otherwise enter the already overwhelmed child welfare system, Ohio benefits from financial savings that result from caregivers accepting responsibility with minimal support. Data reported in 2022-2023:

- Average monthly cost for a child in a foster home - \$5,937
- Annual cost for total number of children in foster care - \$206,821,103
- Monthly cost of a child in receipt of OWF “Child Only” - \$352
- Annual cost of total number of OWF cash assistance - \$12,327,744 which is 6% of foster care costs

Our request is for the legislature to allocate equitable resources given to adoptive and foster families to kinship caregivers to provide the children in their care with the basic security and stability that they deserve. It is requested that the following supports be included for kinship families in the proposed budget:

- Support for family preservation services to prevent removal from the biological parents. Including involving and supporting the kinship/extended family system to achieve this goal.
- Implement the Glisson lawsuit requirements to pay the same rate as licensed foster parents for children in the custody of the public child welfare agency placed in approved kinship homes.
- Increase the monthly amount of the Ohio Works First (OWF) (TANF) child only payment to \$600 per child.
- Use the same eligibility requirement used for the OWF child only payment, which does not consider the income of the kinship caregiver, for child care benefits (which currently consider the income of the caregiver).
- Funding for increased direct supports to families, i.e., mental health services, recreational needs, respite care, educational needs, affordable housing equal to the Ohio Kinship Adoption Navigator program funding.
- Support for adequate and affordable housing.
- Include kinship families in discussion of reform and support efforts.

Along with doing what is best for children and their families, there is a financial benefit to the state and public agencies, which could not accommodate all of the children in kinship care in the child welfare system, when children are placed in a kinship arrangement which is critical for the stability of the family, rather than the cost of a foster care placement.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony today.

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