



NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF
grandparents
for children's rights
ADVOCACY, EDUCATION & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP
FOR CHILDREN AND KINSHIP FAMILIES

Grandfamily Specific Federal Policy Recommendations

Protect and Strengthen Social Security

Ensure maintenance of current Social Security benefits (Retirement, Survivors & Disability) that assist caregivers and children.

Amend Social Security eligibility to allow more children being raised by grandparents or other relatives to qualify as dependents on their relative caregiver's benefits by eliminating the eligibility prerequisite requiring children to be in the care of a grandparent or other relative caregiver one year before the month they begin receiving retirement, disability or survivors benefits. Consider extending eligibility not only to children living with caregivers whose parents have died or are disabled but also to children being raised by caregivers due to parental abandonment, unfitness, incarceration, military deployment or other extraordinary reasons. *Currently, under CFR § 404.350 grandparent and other relative caregivers can receive benefits for dependent children only when the parents are dead or disabled and a grandparent or other relative applies for benefits at the time they are initially entitled to benefits.*

Reinstate the Social Security student benefit. Reinstate the student benefit for children whose parents are deceased or disabled and are enrolled in post-secondary education. Explore approaches to reinstate the student benefit for children who are raised by grandparents or other relatives and receive retirement benefits.

Protect Programs for Grandfamilies from Budget Cuts

Protect Children's Health, Mental Health and Nutrition. Protect Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) from program changes and budget cuts. Such reductions will deny children, including those in grandfamilies, preventive services, specialized treatment and the nutrition assistance they need to promote the healthy social, emotional and physical development needed for their success in school.

Promote Educational Success for Children. Do not cut federal early childhood and education programs. Invest instead in Early Head Start, Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, K-12 Education and Pell Grants, all of which will help promote a quality education and success for children living with grandfamilies and others as they approach graduation and step into society as tomorrow's workforce.

Strengthen Programs to Reach More Children and Caregivers

Expand Outreach to Grandfamilies About Available Programs. Require the Assistant Secretary for the Administration on Aging to train staff of local Area Agencies on Aging about the availability of benefits for children in grandfamilies from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program (TANF) and from Social Security. *Currently under 42 U.S.C. § 3012(a)(20)(A)(iii) the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services must educate on supplemental security income, medical assistance, and food stamps.*

Strengthen TANF Child-Only Grants. Review restrictions being placed by states on TANF child-only grants for children being raised by grandparents and other relatives that are making it difficult for caregivers to continue raising the children. With more than 20 percent of grandparent caregivers at or near the poverty level, the availability of TANF child-only grants for children is a critical support.

Make Food Stamps More Available to Children Raised by Relatives. Amend the definition section of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to allow a child getting a TANF child-only grant to also get a food stamp child-only grant in circumstances where the relative caregiver does not qualify for SNAP to prevent grandchildren and others from being a financial burden to their caregivers. *Currently under 7 U.S.C. § 2012, SNAP mandates that the income and resources of all household members determine food stamp eligibility, resulting in children being raised by relatives receiving a fraction of the food stamps needed to provide adequate nutrition.*

Ensure Children in Grandfamilies are Eligible for the National School Lunch Program. Make children being raised by relatives without parents present, who are not otherwise eligible, automatically eligible for the School Lunch Program provided they appropriately identify themselves to responsible school officials. Eligibility should extend to the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act but also to the Special Milk Program for Children and the School Breakfast Program administered by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

Support Grandfamilies with National Family Caregiver Support Program Funds. Offer incentives for local Area Agencies on Aging to use the full 10 percent of their National Family Caregiver Support Program funds towards services for grandparents and other relatives raising children. The program currently allows, but does not require, states to use up to 10 percent of the funds for this purpose (42 U.S.C. § 373(g)(3)(C)). Many agencies currently do not use any of these dollars for targeted services for grandfamilies. The Administration on Aging should assess and draft a report annually to the public and Congress that examines how Area Agencies on Aging are using these funds to support grandfamilies.

Require a General Accountability Office (GAO) Study of Support for Grandfamilies. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Fostering Connections) includes provisions to support family connections for children in foster care. GAO should assess the implementation of these provisions: the extent to which relatives are receiving the required notice when children enter care and whether it is written notice; whether relatives are being notified of their right to apply to be foster parents; and whether clear uniform rules are in place to certify relatives as foster parents. The GAO also should examine state efforts to use the federal Guardianship Assistance Program and to ensure sibling connections. *Currently, despite improvements in Fostering Connections (Public Law 110-351), many relatives still do not become foster parents because they are not accurately informed of the option and because of training barriers to certification.*

Support Research and Data Collection

Evaluate the Effectiveness of Supportive Services for Grandfamilies. Use research dollars available to the Administration on Children, Youth and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services, including those in the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program, to assess outcomes for children and kinship families, and the cost benefits of supportive services. Assess the extent to which children are diverted to placements with relatives by the child welfare agency or the court; policies and procedures that govern such placements; financial assistance provided in different situations; efforts made to ensure stability and provide essential services to the families; and the effectiveness of such kinship arrangements for the well-being of children. Examine how children raised by relatives who have not been part of formal foster care are treated under the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. Look specifically at the extent to which educational stability protections are provided to children raised by relatives and whether they have access to kinship navigator programs where they exist. See <http://www.empirejustice.org/assets/pdf/policy-advocacy/testimony/private-kinship-care.pdf>.

September 2011