

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Keeping Kids with Family: How Texas Can Better Support Kinship Care

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Across Texas, family members and friends have stepped up to provide homes for children whose parents cannot care for them. These "kinship care" arrangements include all children who receive care from grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, cousins and close family friends for a given period of time. While court orders or the foster care system formally establish some Texas kinship care arrangements, the vast majority are informally arranged by families without any interaction with state authorities.

Informal kinship caregivers save Texas taxpayers millions of dollars every year in foster care costs as they care for children who would otherwise fall into the custody of the state.¹ And more importantly, caregivers offer love and stability to many of the state's most vulnerable children. However, most informal kinship caregivers do not receive adequate support, even when they are eligible for help.

Kinship Care in Texas

According to the most recent estimates from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 253,000 children live in informal or voluntary placement kinship care arrangements in Texas.² In contrast, 10,000 children are formally placed through state-supervised kinship foster care and 16,700 in paid foster care.³

For those children and kinship caregivers who do interact with the official child-welfare system in Texas, financial help is available to support the cost of caring for a child. The Permanency Care Assistance payment made to formal kinship caregivers in Texas is at least \$400 per month.⁴ Texas licensed foster caregivers also receive significant financial support from the state. The minimum foster care payment for a child in Texas is \$693 per month. This support helps to ensure that children receive safe, stable, and nurturing care after removal from their parents' home.

Of all children living away from their parents in Texas, 90 percent are in informal or voluntary kinship care placements. Unfortunately these children in informal kinship care arrangements do not receive the same support as children involved with the state, although they are often in similar situations of financial, social, and emotional distress. They are eligible for some federal and state public benefits and income support programs but often face significant barriers to accessing those resources.

According to data from the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), only 11,000 of the children in the care of a grandparent, other relative, or family friend were receiving monthly Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) payments in November 2013, despite virtually all being eligible. Data from HHSC also indicate that only 130,731 children living in the household of a non-parent caretaker were receiving children's Medicaid, despite virtually all being eligible.

Grandparents who are caring for a grandchild and who have a household income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible to receive a one-time grandparent payment of \$1,000, yet only a small fraction receive it.

Identified Barriers and Policy Recommendations

There are several reasons why kinship caregivers do not access the programs and assistance that would help ensure a stable household for the child in their care. There are steps that the state can take to better support kinship caregivers struggling to provide for the children living with them.

Barriers:

- Difficulty accessing information related to kinship care and support services
- Insufficient TANF cash assistance payments
- Cumbersome legal documentation requirements
- Confusing application and eligibility requirements

Solutions:

- Establish a Kinship Navigator program by forming a partnership with an existing statewide nonprofit to conduct outreach and serve as a referral network for kinship caregivers across the state.
- When a kinship household does apply for a program, the agency in charge of that program should automatically inform the applicant of their potential eligibility for any other programs or services they administer.
- Raise child-only cash payments in the TANF program to be similar to the amount the state pays to caregivers enrolled in the Permanency Care Assistance program.
- Remove the state's \$1,000 liquid asset limit and \$4,650 vehicle value limit for TANF, which prevent all but the most destitute of caregivers from applying for help.
- Enhance the one-time TANF grandparent payment by raising the grant amount to reflect the impact of the inflation since it was first established.
- The state should use its access to digital records to streamline application processes and share data among state agencies.

Read the full report: [Keeping Kids with Family: How Texas Can Better Support Kinship Care](#)

Endnotes

¹ For children in paid foster care, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services reported total foster care payments of \$366,436,000 annually, and an average monthly payment per child of \$1,903 in 2013. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Data Book 2013.

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Books_and_Annual_Reports/2013/finance.asp

² Kids Count Data Center, 2011-2013. While data on the number of voluntary placements overseen by Child Protective Services (CPS) is not available, evidence suggests that the majority of kinship care placements are informal and are made without the knowledge of CPS.

³ There were a total of 27,924 children under state conservatorship in Texas on August 31, 2013. Presentation to the House Select Committee on Child Protection: Interim Charge Presentation. July 1, 2014

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/Child_Protection/pdf/2014_7_1-House_Select_Committee.pdf

⁴ For Permanency Care Assistance payments, the maximum monthly payment amount depends upon the child's authorized service level (ASL). The PCA payment ceiling for a child whose service level is Basic Care is \$400 per month; the payment ceiling for a child whose service level is Moderate, Specialized or Intense is \$545 per month.

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