



2020 Special Committee on Foster Care Oversight Kinship Needs in the Child Welfare System

Chairwoman Concannon, Vice Chair Baumgardner and members of the committee:

We appreciate the committee's time today to focus on enhancing kinship support in the child welfare system. It is evident that we must explore every opportunity to safely reduce the number of children who enter the system and without support for kinship placements we are not using one of our best resources to significantly enhance our system. Kinship placements reduce the need for foster care. Kinship placements need to be our expectation instead of the exception. Unfortunately, kin placements in Kansas are disincentivized: kin receive less support, fewer resources and less training than our non-kin foster parents.

How do kinship placements impact the child welfare system and why are they important?

When a child cannot remain safely in their home, placing them with kin:

- minimizes the trauma of removal
- increases the likelihood of the child remaining connected to their family, including their siblings
- increases the likelihood of the child remaining connected to their community
- increases the number of available foster homes for children that do not have kinship placement options
- improves the child's overall well-being

How does improvement of a child's well-being impact the system?

- improved placement stability
- reduced length of stay in foster care
- improved permanency outcomes
- improved treatment outcomes
- intact families

What barriers need removed so kinship can become the expectation?

Kin placements often happen during a crisis when there has not been time for the kinship parents to prepare for a new child to move into the home. The kinship family immediately has a child or children added to their home and most often without support, resources and training.

Support: In the current Kansas system, kin families do not receive the benefits of being supported by a child placing agency (CPA). CPAs provide individualized support to licensed foster parents in efforts to stabilize the placement in the home. CPA's can offer:

- trained and experienced staff who are specifically available for 24/7 family support
- additional safeguards with supports being designated specifically for both the family and the child
- evidenced based trainings and services
- identification and advocacy for resources needed by the family and each child
- support to remove barriers
 - specific barrier K.S.A. 65 516 with no digression for foster care purposes

Resources: Kinship families need access to respite care, support groups, mentors, adequate financial reimbursement, assessments, services and many other supports. All these resources are currently available to foster parents through CPAs.

Training: Kinship families must be able to access training without unrealistic time barriers or travel expectations creating undue stress on the new family structure. Training curriculum must meet the needs of kinship parents with on demand virtual or in-person training.

Kin families deserve the same high-quality supports, resources, and trainings that non-kinship foster families receive.

- We recommend that each kinship family has an identified CPA and each child has their identified case management provider. Ensuring that these two providers are not the same agency brings both additional resources and checks and balances in a system which foster families already have access.
- We recommend that kinship families have barriers removed to create quick access to temporary licenses with waivers for non-safety requirements.

What might this committee recommend?

The committee might consider a recommendation requesting that DCF report to the House and Senate Budget Committees and the House Children and Seniors Committee on a plan including any funding requests and statutory or regulatory changes necessary to provide kin placements the same resources as non-kin foster parents.

Kin equity with foster parents serves the entire child welfare system and will reduce the number of children who will enter the foster care system. In addition, by offering and stabilizing kinship placements, the reduction in placements and moves as part of the class action lawsuit could be fulfilled. Kansas needs to focus on kin supports.

Thank you for your time today and your commitment to improve the lives of Kansas children.

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