

Provisions of The Kinship Caregiver Support Act (S. 661/H.R. 2188)

1. Establishes a **Kinship Navigator Program**, which will help link relative caregivers, both inside and outside of the formal child welfare system, to a broad range of services and supports that will help them meet the needs of the children in their care. It also will help agencies more effectively and efficiently serve kinship care families. State or local agencies, agencies serving large metropolitan areas, and Indian tribal organizations or a consortium of tribal organizations may apply for the competitive grants.
2. Establishes a **Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program**, which will give states the option to use federal funds for subsidized guardianship payments to certain relative caregivers on behalf of the children they are raising in foster care. State agencies must take steps to rule out return home or adoption for the children and take other steps to ensure that this placement is the best permanency alternative for the child.
3. Allows states to establish **separate licensing standards for relative foster parents and non-relative foster parents**, provided both sets of standards protect children and include criminal record checks. This provision recognizes that certain licensing standards for non-relative foster parents, such as requiring a separate bedroom for each child, may not be appropriate for foster parents who are related to the child.
4. Requires state child welfare agencies to provide **notice within 60 days of the removal of a child from the custody of the child's parents, to all adult grandparents and other relatives of the child**, subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence.
5. **Expands eligibility for the education elements of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program** to include youths exiting from foster care to legal guardianship. This helps current and former foster care youths gain access to higher education through tuition assistance in the form of Education and Training Vouchers (ETV).

Background

Approximately 2.5 million children are being cared for by grandparents and other relatives without either parent present. One in five of these children live below the poverty line and many of the caregivers live on fixed incomes, but only about 30% receive any public financial support. Of the more than half a million children in foster care, about a quarter are living with relatives. Research shows that children raised in foster care with relatives fare well. When compared with children in foster care with non-relatives, children in relative foster care are: just as safe or safer, less likely to have multiple placements, more likely to stay connected with siblings, and less likely to change schools. Unfortunately, under current federal law the caregivers of these children are likely to lose the financial assistance they received as foster parents to meet the needs of the child if they become legal guardians and provide permanent homes for the children. S. 661/H.R. 2188 provide access to important supportive services for relatives caring for children in foster care, and those helping to keep children out of foster care.

To cosponsor the Kinship Caregiver Support Act, your members of Congress can contact:

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