

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency**



**Public Hearing on
Bill 24-0462, the “Grandparent and Close Relative Caregivers
Program Amendment Act of 2021,”**

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on Human Services
The Honorable Brianne K. Nadeau, Chairperson

Council of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building,
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

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Virtual Hearing

<https://www.brianneknadeau.com/committee>

Good morning, Chairwoman Nadeau, councilmembers, and staff. My name is Richard F. Howard, and I am the Supervisory Resource Development Specialist for the Kinship Outreach and Support Unit housed within the District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency, or CFSA. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Grandparent and Close Relative Caregivers Program Amendment Act of 2021.

CFSA supports the purpose of this bill. Amending the eligibility requirements for both the Grandparent and Close Relatives Caregivers Programs will reduce the time it takes for CFSA to deem a family eligible and allow the agency to provide support to families more quickly as an alternative to children entering foster care. Today, I would like to discuss the agency's current support of kinship caregivers and how this amendment will impact our programming.

Relatives raising children in their immediate or extended families for the short or long-term is not a novel phenomenon. Informal caregiver arrangements have always occurred in families and communities across the world and right here in the District for a variety of reasons. When children lack familial supports prepared and willing to commit to their care, they are at risk of entering foster care. In 2006, the District enacted the *Grandparent Caregivers Pilot Program Establishment Act of 2005* (D.C. Law 16–69; D.C. Official Code § 4–251.02 *et seq.*), which established the Grandparent Caregivers Program, or GCP, within CFSA to administer a monthly stipend to eligible District residents with low incomes who are raising their grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great nieces, or great nephews. The subsidy awarded assisted grandparents, great-grandparents, great-aunts or great-uncles to care for a child relative in their home. The Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Support Act of 2009 graduated the program from pilot status and created the permanent GCP. In 2021, we currently serve 755 children through GCP, or 485 families.

Bill 23-0203, the Close Relative Caregivers Subsidies Amendment Act of 2019, proposed to grow the GCP by amending the law to expand eligibility to include “close relatives” to receive a subsidy. The expansion of eligibility gave more families the opportunity to apply and be awarded a subsidy based on funding availability. In 2021, we currently serve 42 children in 29 families through the Close Relative Caregivers Program, or CRCP.

CFSA's Current Support of Kinship Caregivers

CFSA has increasingly expanded services and supports to relative caregivers. Through the Kinship Navigator Program, we administer robust kinship support as the program engages relative caregivers (and potential relative caregivers) of children both inside and outside the foster care system. CFSA uses Kinship Navigator Program funding to augment existing services and supports and leverage community-based services to help improve community and caregiver capacity to keep children safe and well in the homes of their relatives.

In addition, CFSA administers a dedicated Kinship Navigator Warmline to provide direct support as well as information and referral services to callers in the District of Columbia. The line is staffed by trained members of the Kinship Outreach and Support Unit. Support line operators serve a dual function of providing real-time referrals and linkage to nearby community-based resources that are equipped to address any number of issues. The agency's Community Services Resource Directory features a custom module with tools and resources by location and service type to address the needs of kinship caregivers.

Lastly, CFSA is prioritizing awareness to help ensure kinship caregivers across the city know about the support available to them through these programs. We are partnering with the Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center (FAPAC) to standup support groups for these families and with Martha's Table to provide educational enrichment training for Kinship caregivers. Given that Ward 7 and Ward 8 constitute 78 percent of the caregivers participating in the GCP and 71 percent of the caregivers participating in the CRCP, this support is critical as these wards have a higher number of hotline calls. Additionally, to reach grandparents and seniors, the Kinship Outreach and Support Unit is teaming with agencies and community organizations like the DC Department of Aging and Community Living and AARP. CFSA's continued presence at community events and meetings is important as we promote program offerings as well as answer questions about eligibility and the overall application process.

Impact of Legislation

At this time, CFSA's kinship programs require that caregivers demonstrate that they have been the child's primary caregiver and the child has resided with them for the last six months. This proposed legislation removes those requirements. Additionally, it proposes to permit adult parents who have a medically verifiable disability to reside with the caregiver without disqualifying the caregiver from receiving a subsidy. These changes would allow caregivers, who would otherwise not be eligible for a subsidy or would have to wait six months before becoming eligible, to receive financial support so a child can avoid entering foster care.

In closing, this amendment aligns with the important upstream prevention strategies that CFSA is working hard to implement under the District's Thriving Families Safer Children Initiative and Families First DC. As an effort to further strengthen our family safety net, we need to remove as many barriers to assistance as we can. Increasing access to these programs means that more families have access to the resources that help keep their youngest loved ones, fed, clothed, safe, and well.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. At this time, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.