Strategies to Improve Outcomes While In Care

Compiled for Midwestern Legislative Conference, November 2026

Below is a list of possible state legislative actions to consider.

Look at state statutory definitions of "relative" for child welfare purposes. Ensure your child welfare definitions of "relative" are inclusive of kin who are not related to the family and yet are family-like. Consider creating a clear definition section in your code, such as Illinois did as part of its KIND (Kinship in Demand) Act.

Examine your relative notification and engagement requirements. The Illinois KIND Act requires early and ongoing identification and notification of kin for placement and engagement. Possible strategies for family finding to share with your child welfare agency are available in our Kin Engagement Toolkit, and include Missouri's 30 Days to Family.

Encourage your child welfare agency to leverage title IV-E funds for kinship legal services. It's explicitly allowed, but to our knowledge, no state is yet doing it.

Join the states that have been approved to use a separate set of tailored licensing standards for kin. See this map. As part of this process, streamline your barrier crimes for licensing foster parents and align them with the federal Adam Walsh list of felony convictions.

Encourage your agency to replicate a federally approved evidence-based kinship navigator program, like Minnesota is doing. Kinship navigator programs act as a prevention program to help keep children from unnecessarily entering foster care. Any state replicating one of the federally approved models with fidelity can access new, ongoing title IV-E funds for 50% of the costs of the program. Among the federally approved models, Ohio has two you can consider replicating – OhioKAN and Ohio's Kinship Supports Intervention/ProtectOHIO. In addition to title IV-E funds, kinship navigator replication grants using title IV-B funds were recently awarded to the University of Kansas Center and Kids Matter, Inc. in Wisconsin. Other grants will support Tribal adaptations, including through the Regents of the University of Minnesota.

Enhance the use of your state's guardianship assistance program (GAP) by examining state data on its use and consider eliminating any state statutory restrictions that aren't federally required, such as limitations on the age of child or special needs. Enhance the use of GAP by considering your definition of "sibling." Siblings in the same

home as a Title IV-E income eligible child can also exit to GAP even if they aren't IV-E eligible themselves. See pages 3 and 4 of this GAP resource.

Review state adoption assistance data for the percentage of cases that are children adopted by relatives/kin. Adoption assistance is only available for children adopted from foster care. Children who are diverted from foster care will be cut off from accessing this assistance, a fact which kin caregivers are often not told when considering whether to become a foster parent or choose another pathway. Consider legislative action that requires your agency to provide transparent and balanced information to kin assessing their options.

Please don't hesitate to refer your state agencies and community-based organizations to Generations United's Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network for no-cost help.

Also, please share our resources with your constituents who are kin caregivers, including:

- State specific charts comparing guardianship and adoption for children with kin exiting foster care,
- information on SNAP, WIC, & TANF, and
- instructions for kinship families on how to complete the FAFSA federal financial aid application for higher education.

www.gksnetwork.org

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