



HB 324 by Raymond: Support for Relative Caregivers in the Foster Care System

House Human Services Committee

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Chairman Rose and members, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. Texans Care for Children is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated exclusively to the children of Texas. We look to our broad base of community-based experts—our members and partners who together represent thousands of Texas children—to inform our work and help us in developing our legislative agenda. These partners have empowered Texans Care to mobilize coalition groups to work together towards common solutions to the difficult conditions many Texas children and youth face and to assist local communities in advocating for their own children's needs. Our focus areas are: family economic security; infant, child and maternal health; children's mental health; child welfare; and juvenile justice and at-risk youth.

HB 324 by Raymond would help children involved in the foster care system who are cared for by relatives. In providing financial assistance to some relative caregivers of children under temporary state custody in child abuse and neglect cases, the state supports a practice that increases chances for permanency and stability for children removed from their parents' care. Though kinship care is not the best choice for every child, when it is a safe option for a child, relative placement provides love and care in a familiar setting. Evaluation of relative caregiver assistance in Texas has shown kincare to be safer, last longer, and have better outcomes compared to foster care placementsⁱ. Kinship care allows children to maintain family and community connections, maintain ethnic and cultural identities, and reduces the trauma caused through loss and attachment issues.ⁱⁱ

Even though kincare is a best practice in child welfare, not all relatives willing to provide a safe, loving home for a child have the financial resources to take a child into their home on their current income. National research on the demographics of relative caregivers demonstrates the financial need of these families who help the state to do its job of protecting children removed from their biological home due to abuse or neglect:

- Of children in kinship care, 55% live with a single caregiver, and 52% live with a caregiver over 50 years of age.ⁱⁱⁱ

- About a quarter (24%) of children in kinship care live with a caregiver without a high school degree.^{iv}
- A greater proportion of kinship families live in poverty than non-kin foster families. 50% of children in kinship foster care live in low-income households, compared with 24% of children living with non-kin foster parents.^v
- Nationally, the biggest barriers for kinship families are financial.^{vi}
- Paid relative placements tend to last 30% longer than non-relative placements.^{vii}

HB 324 would increase the monetary assistance only to relative caregivers with an income less than 200% of the federal poverty line caring for a sibling group or a child with a physical or mental disability or an emotional handicap. Texans Care For Children supports caregiver support for all foster children for whom relative care is an appropriate placement, including, but not limited to, lower-income families caring for disabled children or sibling groups.

One point of clarification is that the kinship care assistance provided under HB 324 is not directly related to new federal assistance available under the federal Fostering Connections to Success Act. HB 324 would apply only to relatives caring for children in the *temporary* care of the state. The federal legislation applies to children in the *permanent* care of the state and is customary called guardianship or subsidized guardianship. Other legislation before this committee relates to implementation of a subsidized guardianship program in Texas.

Thank you again for your time and commitment, and for favorable passage of HB 324 from this committee to the full House. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the staff of Texans Care For Children at 512.473.2274.

ⁱ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, "Overview and Preliminary Evaluation of the Relative Caregiver Assistance Program." (2008).
http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/Child_Protection/pdf/2008-09-22_Kinship-Evaluation.pdf , p. 9-10.

ⁱⁱ LeProhn, 1993, Ehrle, Geen, & Clark, 2001, cited in Gionfriddo, Frausto, Moore, and Rutledge "Family Ties: Kinship Care in San Antonio" (2002), Casey Family Programs, p. 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Urban Institute, "Children in Kinship Care," *Assessing the New Federalism: An Urban Institute Project*.

^{iv} *Ibid.*

^v Ehrle, Geen, & Main, "Kinship Foster Care: Custody, Hardships, and Services" *Snapshots of America's Families III* No. 4 (November 2003) The Urban Institute. Available online:

<http://www.urban.org/publications/310893.html>

^{vi} Teutsch, Norton. "Kinship Care: A National Analysis and a Texas Proposal," (2001), p. 4.

^{vii} Brooks, D. "Kinship care and substance-exposed children," *The Source*, (1999) pp 1-21. Cited in Teutsch, p. 8.