



## **SB 1411 by West: Support for Relative Caregivers in the Foster Care System**

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

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Chair Nelson 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.

SB 1411 by West 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 permanent conservatorship of the state 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 placements<sup>i</sup>. 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.<sup>ii</sup>

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.<sup>iii</sup>

- About a quarter (24%) of children in kinship care live with a caregiver without a high school degree.<sup>iv</sup>
- 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.<sup>v</sup>
- Nationally, the biggest barriers for kinship families are financial.<sup>vi</sup>
- Paid relative placements tend to last 30% longer than non-relative placements.<sup>vii</sup>

The kinship care assistance provided under SB 1411 is directly related to new federal assistance available under the federal Fostering Connections to Success Act. SB 1411 would assist children who would not be reunited with their family or adopted to achieve a safe, stable permanent home with family, which is customarily called guardianship or subsidized guardianship, rather than long-term foster care in the custody of the state.

Thank you again for your time and commitment, and for favorable passage of SB 1411 from this committee to the full Senate. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the staff of Texans Care For Children at 512.473.2274.

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<sup>i</sup> 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](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/Child_Protection/pdf/2008-09-22_Kinship-Evaluation.pdf), p. 9-10.

<sup>ii</sup> 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.

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

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>v</sup> 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>

<sup>vi</sup> Teutsch, Norton. "Kinship Care: A National Analysis and a Texas Proposal," (2001), p. 4.

<sup>vii</sup> Brooks, D. "Kinship care and substance-exposed children," *The Source*, (1999) pp 1-21. Cited in Teutsch, p. 8.