

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 13, 2018

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act (P.L. 115-196) was signed into law on July 7, 2018, marking a milestone for families that have been pulled apart by our nation's opioid crisis. This law establishes a federal advisory council to provide information about available resources to support grandparents and other relatives who are raising grandchildren. As the opioid crisis continues to rage, we request that the Department of Health and Human Services prioritize the swift, comprehensive and thoughtful implementation of the law to ensure that grandparents receive the supports they need to raise the children in their care.

More than 42,000 Americans died from opioid overdoses in 2016. This is the highest number of overdose deaths due to opioids on record.¹ As opioids continue to devastate families, the number of grandparents taking in their grandchildren is on the rise. Approximately 2.6 million children are currently being raised by their grandparents or other relatives.²

Grandparents who are raising grandchildren encounter several unique emotional, physical and financial challenges. For example, many grandparents find themselves caring for children affected by neonatal abstinence syndrome, a condition that increased five-fold across the nation between 2000 and 2012 because of the opioid epidemic.³ Others care for children who have been affected by trauma related to living in drug-affected homes, leading to a range of physical, mental and behavioral health problems.

The primary goal of the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act is to leverage and make existing resources more accessible to ease the journey for grandparents who are stepping in to keep families together during this opioid crisis. The legislation creates an Advisory Council to support grandparents raising grandchildren and has two major components:

¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Opioid Overdose*, (Oct. 23, 2017) found at, <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/index.html> (last visited July 24, 2018).

² Generations United, *Raising the Children of the Opioid Epidemic: Solutions and Support for Grandfamilies*, at 2 (September 2017), found at, <https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2018/05/Grandfamilies-Report-SOGF-2017.pdf> (last visited September 12, 2018).

³ U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Dramatic Increases in Maternal Opioid Use and Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome*, (September, 2015), found at, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/dramatic-increases-in-maternal-opioid-use-neonatal-abstinence-syndrome> (last visited September 12, 2018).

1. **Information for grandparents.** The law requires the Advisory Council to identify, promote, coordinate and publicly disseminate information and resources to help grandparents meet the needs of children in their care and to also provide information and resources to help grandparents maintain their own health and personal well-being. As authors of the bill, we intend for the materials that the Advisory Council produces to serve as a “one-stop-shop” to help these grandparents.
2. **Report to Congress, States and the public.** The law directs the Advisory Council to issue two reports to Congress, State agencies, and the public, the first of which is due within six months of enactment. The report shall highlight best practices, resources, and other useful information for grandparents, including information related to the needs of children who have been impacted by the opioid epidemic. The report shall also identify gaps in grandfamilies’ current needs.

We are committed to working with the Department to support meaningful implementation of this law to accomplish these objectives. To further support immediate implementation, the Senate-passed Fiscal Year 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill includes \$300,000 for the Secretary to establish the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. Please advise us on the steps that are being taken to swiftly implement the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act. [REDACTED]

Thank you for supporting our family caregivers. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Peter T. King
Member of Congress