

**Statement of Ruth Stevens
Grandparent Caregiver
June 23rd, 2022**

Hearing before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Grandfamilies and Kinship Families

Good morning, Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Scott and members of the Senate Special Committee on Grandparent Caregivers. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you all today as a grandmother and a caregiver.

My name is Ruth Stevens. I am 75 years old. I was born in North Philadelphia, and I grew up in the same community I live now. I have two biological children, a daughter and a son. My grandson Tamir is here with me today. I've always loved taking care of children and I hate to see them unhappy. I've raised more than 10 children who were not my own. It's very dangerous on the streets of North Philadelphia and every child that I have taken care of graduated school and stayed off drugs while they lived with me. I taught the children I had how to ride a bicycle, read and take care of themselves. I went with them on trips, no matter what I had to do, I made sure I went with them to their activities and that they knew someone was there for them.

When my grandson Tamir was born, I found out that he was placed in foster care with a white family in Northumberland, PA, who I keep in touch with today, and they wanted to adopt him. Tamir is my grandson and he needed to be with me. I took the train, which was about 3 1/2 hours from Philadelphia to see the family a few times trying to get him though knew I needed legal support. A community member told me about the Senior Law Center and shared that they may be able to help me. It took about a month, and I was eventually able to bring Tamir home with me. He was about 8 weeks old. I had to do what I had to do to get my grandchild. It was not easy; Tamir was on a breathing machine, an oxygen machine and an asthma machine. He needed a lot of support.

I was 50 years old when I got him, and it was not easy. I did not drive and brought him to all of his medical appointments on the bus or the train. I got help from different programs in the community. I was on public assistance. I received a small check to take care of him. We struggled for a while until he was able to get on disability insurance.

A community member told me about the Temple University Family Friends program where I connected with other grandparents. Family Friends is a program based at Temple University that provides support to grandparents and kinship families in Philadelphia who have taken on the role of primary caregiver for related children with special needs. The program serves 160 families and children annually. With the Temple program, I receive a lot of support. We met once a month before COVID as a support group to help address issues of stress and isolation of the grandparents and kinship family members. We went on trips, and they connected us to resources in the city. I always had somewhere to take Tamir. During COVID, we were not able to get together or have activities and it was very difficult. We do have a trip coming up at an amusement park and Tamir and I are going on the trip. Tamir's mentor from Temple program took him to play basketball, and they went to the games together. His mentor often calls to check

on me and Tamir to make sure we are okay. The Family Friends program is my support system. I have been in the program since Tamir was 8 years old.

Tamir is doing ok, I guess. He just graduated from high school. He has asthma but has not had an asthma attack in a while. Tamir still faces challenges with his hearing, and he has hearing aids. His hearing aids cost about \$2,000. He just got a small job at Walmart, which is good, but I am working with Community Legal Services to make sure that he can keep his disability benefits.

He still has challenges even though, as a teenager, he thinks he is ok. He doesn't get sick as often anymore, which is a good thing. Sometimes he acts like he cares about me but sometimes he acts like I'm his worst enemy. It can be isolating. I am able to go to therapy once a week to meet other older ladies. We talk and laugh together and that is my fun.

During the pandemic, my iPad was the only way I communicated. There was nothing else I could do. I went from iPad to laptop, cleaned my house and kept myself busy. Now I am starting to go outside and do other activities. Taking care of kids makes me feel loved. I know somebody loves me. It gives me a sense of purpose. Even though it is very hard, I enjoy it. It is very dangerous for these kids out there on the streets. I do the best that I can to keep Tamir safe and I am proud of myself for raising him.