

## **The Informing Grandfamilies Act**

*Lead sponsors: Senators Bob Casey (D-Pennsylvania) and Todd Young (R-Indiana)*

**Background.** A recent [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) study](#) indicated that more than 2.7 million children in the United States are being raised by grandparents and other relatives, also known as kinship caregivers, outside of the foster care system. This is approximately 20 times the number of children placed with kinship caregivers than through the foster care system. While experts believe these numbers have climbed due to the recent opioid epidemic, there is a long history of grandparents and other relatives stepping in to care for children when parents are unable. And, the COVID-19 pandemic may add to those numbers.

Taking on the role of kinship caregiver can come unexpectedly and with little help. Grandparents and other relatives often face challenges generating and shifting income streams, or end up postponing retirement to be able to afford raising a child. The pandemic has likely contributed to greater economic hardship and increased health concerns.

As GAO noted in its report, it is important that states link grandfamilies to a range services and supports in their communities, including those not administered directly by child welfare agencies. Many relative caregivers are eligible for federal and state assistance, like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, to help make ends meet. However, some older adults caring for a younger relative may not be accessing all of the available benefits through the state's TANF program. Furthermore, experts and community-based providers have indicated that some grandfamilies may not be aware of other government programs that are available to help with basic needs. There may also be a benefit in ensuring that relative caregivers receive more information about how to become a legal guardian, foster parent or adoptive parent.

Older adults raising relative children should not be forced to go searching for this information. If a grandparent has taken on the responsibility of raising a younger relative, state and local governments should do everything possible to ensure that they are connected to all available programs, resources, and supportive services. Given the direct communication states have with many older relatives caring for children who receive TANF cash assistance, states should use that opportunity to educate families about additional supports.

**Bill description.** The Informing Grandfamilies Act will require states to use their existing channel of communication with grandfamilies who are receiving or applying for TANF cash assistance in order to provide these families with information about other available resources. Specifically, the bill will require states to provide these grandfamilies with information on:

- Potential options for the family to become formal foster parents or legal guardians to the child and to receive support on the child's behalf;
- Additional TANF supports that are offered by the state; and
- Contact information for the state's Kinship Navigator Program or other state agencies and community organizations that guide the family toward other support programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Medicaid.