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**Testimony Before the Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee on Health and Human Services**

**Public Hearing:  
Legislation B23-203  
“Close Relative Caregivers Subsidies Amendment Act of 2019”  
April 24, 2019**

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Executive Director, DC KinCare Alliance**

Good morning Chairperson Nadeau and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Marla Spindel, and I am the co-founder and Executive Director of the DC KinCare Alliance. I am pleased to testify today in support of the “Close Relative Caregivers Subsidies Amendment Act of 2019.”

DC KinCare Alliance was founded in 2017 to serve the needs of relative caregivers raising DC’s at-risk children. We are the only legal services organization in the city that serves exclusively relative caregivers. We do this through providing information and educational programs in the community (e.g., Caregiver Raise Me Up Groups; Relative Caregiver Resource Guide), brief legal advice at our walk-in-clinic and through our legal helpline, as well as full representation in court. Through our work in the community with kinship families, we are uniquely able to listen, identify unmet needs and services, and advocate for enhanced supports for these families. In just our first 16 months of serving DC relative caregivers with one full-time staff attorney, we have helped over 175 caregivers raising over 200 DC children. While we have this special relationship with and knowledge about kinship families, we are disappointed to report that the DC Child and Family Services Agency (“CFSA”) has not consulted with us in establishing and operating its Kinship Navigator Program, as required by the Family First Prevention Services Act.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Section 427(a)(1)(B) of the Family First Prevention Services Act provides that kinship navigators “*shall be planned and operated in consultation with kinship caregivers and organizations representing them*,” youth

When children cannot live safely at home with their parents, they often live with relatives, who step up to help the family during times of crisis. Here in D.C., 9,000 children are living in the care of relatives with no parent present.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 67% of those relatives are grandparents, while the remaining 33% are other relatives, such as aunts, uncles, adult sisters, and adult brothers.<sup>3</sup> Research shows that abused or neglected children who are raised by relatives generally have better outcomes, fewer placement disruptions, and a greater chance for permanency than those who live with non-relatives.<sup>4</sup> However, many of these relatives live in poverty with housing and food instability, which becomes especially dire when a new child enters the home and there is no money for the additional expenses associated with raising that child. It has been found that foster care payments likely play an important role in reducing the risk of poverty for this group.<sup>5</sup> However, most of the relatives who care for

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raised by kinship caregivers, relevant government agencies, and relevant community-based or faith-based organizations.”

<sup>2</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Center*, “Children in kinship care in District of Columbia,” available at <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7172-children-in-kinship-care?loc=10&loct=3#detailed/3/any/true/1687,1652,1564,1491,1443,1218,1049,995/any/14207,14208>.

<sup>3</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, *America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2018*, Table FAM1.B: Family structure and children’s living arrangements: Detailed living arrangements of children by gender, race and Hispanic origin, age, parent’s education, and poverty status, 2017, available at <https://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/fam1b.asp>. In the 16 months DC KinCare Alliance has been operating, it has served caregivers raising over 200 DC children. A review of our records shows percentages of grandparent to other relatives raising DC children consistent with the national percentages.

<sup>4</sup> Winokur, M., Crawford, G., Longobardi, R., & Valentine, D. (2008). Matched Comparison of Children in Kinship Care and Foster Care on Child Welfare Outcomes. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 89(3), 338-346. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.3759>; Winokur, M., Holtan, A., & Batchelder, K. (2014). Kinship care for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children removed from the home for maltreatment. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 1*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD006546.pub3>.

<sup>5</sup> See Poverty Among Foster Children: Estimates Using the Supplemental Poverty Measure, PMC 2017 Jun 26, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5484162/>.

these children do so informally, without the supports and services associated with foster care.

Significantly, in its Grandparent Caregivers Program (GCP) Annual Status Report for calendar year 2018, CFSA champions the Program as a valuable component of its Four Pillars strategy in that it “provides families the support they need to prevent children from entering foster care.”<sup>6</sup> Table 2 of the Report states that 99% of children receiving GCP services were “diverted” from entering foster care.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the city saves an enormous amount of money because it does not have to pay the costs associated with foster care for these diverted children.

DC KinCare Alliance believes that arranging for children to live with relatives *to prevent abuse or neglect from happening in the first place* is an appropriate child welfare tool to protect children. However, we contend that CFSA improperly diverts children in serious cases of abuse or neglect in order to artificially reduce its foster care numbers, which often sets families up for failure with no services, safe pathway home, or permanency for the child. Indeed, research and DC KinCare Alliance client experiences show that the decision to utilize kinship diversion in lieu of foster care is not dependent on

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<sup>6</sup> CSFA Grandparent Caregivers Program Annual Status Report CY 2018 (February 28, 2019), p.4, available at [https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA\\_Grandparent%20Caregivers%20Program%20Annual%20Report%202018\\_%202-28-19%20%28FINAL%29.pdf](https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA_Grandparent%20Caregivers%20Program%20Annual%20Report%202018_%202-28-19%20%28FINAL%29.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

maltreatment type or severity, but rather on whether there is a willing relative available to take the child informally.<sup>8</sup> So, a child in a kinship diversion arrangement could have experienced the same type and/or severity of abuse or neglect as another child who is placed in foster care. Yet, the relative who takes the child informally gets no financial assistance even though he or she provides the same or better emotional supports as a foster parent as well as food and shelter. While we are not in agreement with when and how CFSA implements informal kinship diversion, we recognize that it is occurring. Accordingly, we must help these diverted children to succeed by providing relative caregivers at least the same financial and other supports we provide to foster parents, and we should do so regardless of whether they are great aunts or aunts, grandfathers or older brothers.

Attached to this Testimony at Exhibit A is a chart setting forth DC KinCare Alliance's Appropriations Proposal of \$2.8 million for FY 2020 to fund the "Close Relatives Caregivers Subsidies Amendment Act of 2019." We have also attached at Exhibit B another chart that explains how the GCP Subsidy saves the city millions of dollars annually because relatives are doing

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<sup>8</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). *The Kinship Diversion Debate: Policy and Practice Implications for Children, Families and Child Welfare Agencies*. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-kinship-diversion-debate/>; Malm, K., & Allen, T. (2016, July 1). *A Qualitative Research Study of Kinship Diversion Practices*. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/a-qualitative-research-study-of-kinship-diversion-practices-2-2/>

the hard work to raise abused, neglected, or other at-risk DC children, many of whom would be in foster care had these relatives not stepped up to help their families. Specifically, the chart shows that the city already saves \$20.7 million annually in foster care and related costs for the children who receive the GCP Subsidy that were diverted from foster care. With the expansion of the GCP Subsidy to other relatives and children, the city would save an additional \$10.2 million annually, for a total annual savings of \$30.9 million. In order to ensure the safety and well-being of these children, these savings must be reinvested to support kinship families so they can raise these children to be healthy and productive members of the DC community now and in the future.

I have with me today four relative caregivers (three aunts and one adult brother) who will tell you how much they have struggled and how the expansion of the GCP Subsidy will make a difference in the lives of the children they have stepped up to raise. I have also attached a letter from another relative caregiver (an aunt) who could not be here today, but who wanted you to know her story (See Exhibit C).

As a final note, one of the things you will hear from these relatives today is the difficulties they have had obtaining benefits on behalf of the children they raise, like TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid. This is because the benefits rules are tailored to parent head of household families, and not kinship families. We would like to explore having a Kinship Office within at least one of the DHS

Service Centers to make it easier for relative caregivers to receive benefits for the children they have welcomed into their families. We are happy to discuss this and other ideas we have to help kinship families with the Council at your convenience.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am available to answer any questions.

EXHIBIT A  
CLOSE RELATIVE CAREGIVERS SUBSIDIES AMENDMENT ACT OF 2019  
DC KINCARE ALLIANCE PROPOSAL FOR FY 2020 APPROPRIATION

799	Average Number of DC Children Receiving the Grandparent Subsidy in CY2018 <sup>1</sup>
67%	Nationally, for children cared for by relatives who are not foster parents where no parent lives in the home, the percentage of those children cared for by grandparents <sup>2</sup>
33%	Nationally, for children cared for by relatives who are not foster parents where no parent lives in the home, the percentage of those children cared for by relatives who are not grandparents <sup>3</sup>
1,192	Number of DC children eligible to receive the Grandparent Subsidy under the Close Relative Amendment, using 799 to represent the universe of DC children currently eligible to receive the Grandparent Subsidy $799 / 67\% = 1,192$
393	Number of DC children who will become eligible to receive the Grandparent Subsidy under the Close Relative Amendment Act (living with relatives other than grandparents) $1,192 - 799 = 393$
\$19.83	Average daily rate per child paid under Grandparent Caregiver Program Subsidy for CY2018 <sup>4</sup>
\$7,238	Average annual subsidy payment per child for Grandparent Caregiver Program Subsidy for CY2018 $\$19.83 \times 365 \text{ days} = \$7,238$
\$2.8 million	Additional annual amount needed to pay the subsidy for the 430 DC children who will become eligible to receive the Grandparent Subsidy under the Close Relative Amendment Act (living with relatives other than grandparents) $\$7,238 \times 393 \text{ children} = \$2.8 \text{ million}$

<sup>1</sup> CSFA Grandparent Caregivers Program Annual Status Report CY2018 (February 28, 2019), p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2018*, Table FAM1.B: Family structure and children's living arrangements: Detailed living arrangements of children by gender, race and Hispanic origin, age, parent's education, and poverty status, 2017, available at <https://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/fam1b.asp>. In the 16 months DC KinCare Alliance has been operating, it has served caregivers raising over 200 DC children. A review of our records shows percentages of grandparent to other relatives raising DC children consistent with the national percentages.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> CSFA Grandparent Caregivers Program Annual Status Report CY2018 (February 28, 2019), p.5.

**EXHIBIT B**  
**CLOSE RELATIVE CAREGIVER AMENDMENT ACT OF 2019**  
**DC KINCARE ALLIANCE BUDGET SAVINGS CHART**

A	\$28 million	CFSA FY 2020 Local Funds Proposed Budget Request for “Child Placement Services.” This includes foster care payments as well as operating costs of the DC foster care system, such as social workers, administration, & contracting.
B	839	Number of children in foster care in FY 2020, based on Director Donald’s testimony at the CFSA Performance Oversight Hearing that foster care numbers will likely remain unchanged from FY 2018.
C	\$33,373	The costs to the city for each foster care child per year in FY 2020. (\$28 million divided by 839 children).
D	\$5.8 million	CFSA FY 2020 Local Funds Proposed Budget Request for the Grandparent Caregiver Program (GCP) Subsidy under current law.
E	799	Number of children who would receive the GCP Subsidy under the current law in FY 2020. (Utilizing the average monthly number of children served in CY 2018). <sup>1</sup>
F	393	Number of additional DC children who will become eligible to receive the GCP Subsidy under the Close Relative Caregivers Subsidies Amendment Act of 2019 (living with relatives other than grandparents). <sup>2</sup>
G	1,192	Total number of children who would receive the GCP Subsidy with the expansion (Add Rows E and F).
H	1,180	Total number of children who would receive the GCP Subsidy with the expansion (Row G) who were diverted from foster care (99%). <sup>3</sup> (99% of 1,192).
I	\$7,238	Average GCP Subsidy payment per child per year. <sup>4</sup> (Average daily rate per child, without offsets, of \$19.83 multiplied by 365 days).
J	\$2.8 million	Additional funds required for the expansion of the GCP for FY 2020 (Row F multiplied by Row I).

<sup>1</sup> See CSFA Grandparent Caregivers Program Annual Status Report CY2018 (February 28, 2019), p.3, available at [https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA\\_Grandparent%20Caregivers%20Program%20Annual%20Report%202018\\_%202-28-19%20%28FINAL%29.pdf](https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA_Grandparent%20Caregivers%20Program%20Annual%20Report%202018_%202-28-19%20%28FINAL%29.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See Exhibit A to DC KinCare Alliance Testimony of April 24, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> CFSA Grandparent Caregivers Program Annual Status Report CY 2018, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> CSFA Grandparent Caregivers Program Annual Status Report CY2018, p.5.

K	\$8.6 million	Total FY 2020 funds required to pay for the GCP Subsidy with the expansion. (Add Rows D and J).
L	\$26.4 million	Total costs to the city under the current law if 99% of the 799 children who received the GCP Subsidy who were diverted from foster care had instead been placed in foster care. (99% of 799 = 791; then multiply 791 by Row C).
M	\$20.7 million	Total savings to the city under the current law because these 791 children (See Row L) were diverted from foster care. (Multiply 791 by Row I = \$5.7 million, then subtract \$5.7 million from Row L).
N	\$13 million	Total costs to the city if the additional children diverted from foster care under the expansion would instead be placed in foster care. (99% of 393 = 389; then multiply 389 by Row C).
O	\$10.2 million	Total savings to the city because these 389 children (See Row N) would be diverted from foster care. (389 times \$7,238 = \$2.8 million; then subtract \$2.8 million from Row N).
P	\$39.4 million	Total costs to the city if the 1,180 children diverted from foster care under current law and the expansion would instead be placed in foster care. (Add Rows L and N).
Q	\$30.9 million	Total savings to the city because these 1,180 children (See Row P) would be diverted from foster care. (Add Rows M and O).