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**The DC Council and Mayor Bowser Should Take Immediate Action
to Ensure the Safety and Security of Kinship Families
During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency**

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We know that there are devastating impacts for children growing up in poverty.¹ Specifically, poverty has been found to alter children's developing brain architecture, leading to significantly lower educational achievement, earnings, and overall health, as well as disproportionately higher rates of developmental delays and learning disabilities.² Importantly, there is a dose-response pattern, such that outcomes are worse the longer children are exposed to poverty.³ Interventions, such as the DC's Grandparent Caregiver Program (GCP) and Close Relative Caregiver Program (CRCP), can disrupt the negative effects of childhood poverty and must be fully implemented for their purposes to be fully achieved.

According to the DC Child and Family Services Agency's ("CFSA's") GCP Annual Status Report for FY 2018, 66% of the recipients of the GCP subsidy receive TANF, which means they live well below the poverty line. The annual average GCP subsidy together with TANF effectively brings a family up to the poverty line.

Unfortunately, the GCP has had a waiting list since at least August 2019, and both the GCP and the CRCP require a relative to care for a child for a minimum of six months before that caregiver is eligible to apply for the subsidy. These delays in the provision of the GCP and CRCP subsidies cause real hardship to relative caregivers and the children they raise. The children often arrive with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the relative caregiver has to scramble to buy food, clothing, shoes, toiletries, bedding and even a bed. The up-front costs of a child's unexpected arrival are great and our kinship caregivers do not have savings or other resources available to cover these costs. *These burdens are exacerbated by the current public health emergency when resources are scarcer and individuals are losing their jobs and other sources of income.*

DC must take action the following actions to ensure immediate access to the GCP and CRCP subsidies to help bring these children out of poverty and protect their short- and long-term development:

¹ Toxic Stress Key Concepts," Harvard University Center on the Developing Child.

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>.

² Perry Firth, "Homelessness and Academic Achievement: The Impact of Childhood Stress on School Achievement," Firesteel: The Network of Washington YWCAs Washington. (September 8, 2014).

<http://firesteelwa.org/2014/09/homelessness-and-academic-achievement-the-impact-of-childhood-stress-on-school-performance/>

³ Hair NL, Hanson JL, Wolfe BL, Pollak SD. Association of Child Poverty, Brain Development, and Academic Achievement. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2015;169(9):822–829. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.1475.

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2381542>.

(1) Eliminate the GCP Waiting List. DC KinCare Alliance recommends that the Mayor or, if the Mayor fails to do so immediately, the DC Council reprogram FY 2020 funds saved in other CFSA programs to the GCP to eliminate the waiting list that has been in effect since at least August 2019.⁴ Unless a grandparent-led family does not recertify or the child ages out of the program, no new GCP applicants can receive the subsidy in FY 2020 without additional funding.⁵ According to CFSA, there were 46 families on the GCP waiting list as of January 31, 2020.⁶ We estimate that the cost of eliminating those 46 families from the waiting list would be \$264,518. This amount was determined by multiplying 46 times CFSA’s reported average monthly GCP subsidy rate per family of \$1,150.08⁷ for the months of April through August, 2020.⁸ We also recommend reprogramming an estimated additional amount of \$220,522⁹ to ensure GCP subsidies may be paid to families added to the waiting list since January 31, 2020 to date, as well as families who apply and are approved for a GCP subsidy from now through August, 2020. This recommendation has no fiscal impact because funds saved from other programs would be used for this purpose.

(2) Waive or Repeal the GCP and CRCP Six-Month Eligibility Period. We further recommend that the Mayor waive the six-month eligibility period for the GCP and CRCP pursuant to the enhanced powers granted by the COVID-19 Response Emergency Amendment Act of 2020 to “take such other actions . . . to support . . . access to . . . any public benefit program.”¹⁰ If the Mayor fails to take such action immediately, the DC Council should repeal the six-month eligibility period for the GCP and CRCP permanently,¹¹ or at least for the period of any public health emergency.¹² This recommendation has no fiscal impact because it only affects the timing of funds distribution and does not allocate additional funds to the GPC or CRCP in FY2020.

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The Mayor, or if the Mayor fails to act, then the DC Council must take immediate action to support kinship families and prevent children from experiencing the devastating effects of poverty at this extremely challenging time.

⁴ The Mayor has the authority to reprogram funds without DC Council approval for amounts under \$500,000. *See* The Reprogramming Policy Act of 2002, codified at D.C. Code § 47-361 *et seq.*

⁵ Child and Family Services Agency Performance Oversight Hearing Fiscal Year 2019 – 2020, *Responses to Hearing Questions*, 104 n.7 (January 31, 2020).

⁶ Child and Family Services Agency Performance Oversight Hearing Fiscal Year 2019 – 2020, *Responses to Hearing Questions*, 104.

⁷ *Id.* at 103.

⁸ We calculated using five rather than six remaining months in FY 2020 because the GCP subsidy is paid in arrears; accordingly, subsidy distributions for September 2020 will not be paid until October 2020, which is in FY 2021.

⁹ \$88,205 would fund GCP subsidies for an estimated 15.4 families added to the waiting list in February and March, 2020, and \$132,317 would fund GCP subsidies for an estimated 38.4 families approved at the rate of 7.67 families per month from now through August, 2020.

¹⁰ Section 303 of COVID-19 Response Emergency Amendment Act of 2020.

¹¹ This would be effected by amending D.C. Code §§ 4-251.03(a) and 4-251.23(a) to eliminate the phrase “at least the previous 6 months.”

¹² This would be effected by adding a provision in D.C. Code §§ 4-251.03(a-1) and 4-251.23(b) that the Mayor “shall waive the 6 month eligibility period during any public health emergency.”