

DC KINCARE ALLIANCE
RELATIVE CAREGIVER COMMUNITY BOARD
Position Statement on Kinship Navigator Programs

February 2022

Why We Care

The DC KinCare Alliance Relative Caregiver Community Board is a group of 21 relative caregivers raising 26 Washington, DC children. We took in these children because their parents could not take care of them due to: gun violence, incarceration, substance use disorders, and mental health problems. The children we are raising are great kids but they need extra help because of the abuse and neglect they suffered before they came to live with us. We need help because we do not have much money, we were not expecting these children to come to us, and there is a lot to figure out to make sure they have everything they need. Our leaders need to listen to our lived experiences and our ideas about what kinship families need from the government.

What Kind of Help We Need

We face an uphill battle every time we try to get help for these children because the legal, government benefits, healthcare and educational systems are all designed for traditional families, not families that look like ours. It is really hard to figure out what we are supposed to do when we are trying to get the children what they need. We need one place to go to find help for caregivers like us, whether we are trying to get custody to keep the children safe, get financial benefits to feed and clothe them, get a bigger housing unit so they have a proper place to sleep, get them evaluated for an IEP or registered for school, take them to the doctor or dentist, or get them help for developmental, behavioral, or mental health issues. A lot of times, we do not even have basic documents for the children, like Medicaid cards, birth certificates or Social Security cards, and we need those documents to get almost any kind of benefits or services for them.

How We Need to Receive Help

Kinship navigator programs can help us get what we need but they cannot just take our information and send us to different places for different things because we run into so many roadblocks. We need an actual person, like a case manager, to get us emergency help when the children first come to us in crisis with nothing but the clothes on their back. Then, we need that person to help us get documents, walk us through applying for benefits, and add the children to our housing vouchers. We need help and advice from lawyers to get the legal rights to care for these children and understand all our options to keep them safe. **DC's kinship navigator program does not do these things.**

Kinship Navigators Should Not Be Part of the Child Welfare Agency

Kinship caregivers like us do not feel safe, respected, or understood by the DC child welfare agency. Many of us have had bad experiences with child welfare social workers saying one thing but doing another. The bottom line is that we are afraid to ask for help from the child welfare agency because they can always use that against us and try to take our kids away. **Kinship navigators should be separate from the child welfare agency so we can get help from people who are just there for us and who do not answer to the agency for their jobs or their money.**

Inquiries about this Position Statement may be directed to:

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