

Position Statement

For 2022 Session

Foster Care/Kinship Position

Proposal

Issue: With the overall statewide numbers for relative/kinship placements continually increasing, the system investment in supporting our relative/kinship providers has not kept pace resulting in the need of increased support and services across the state.

Minnesota faces increased opportunities to improve and reform our work with kinship caregivers under the Family First Prevention and Services Act (FFPSA). Our convictions for quality care must be evidenced by key investments in direct services and resources focused on supporting, preserving, and strengthening families while keep children safe.

Implementation Strategy:

In 2020, Aspire MN formulated a workgroup with private licensing agencies, Counties, and the Department of Human Services to discuss concerns facing relative/kinship providers across the state of MN in an attempt to identify systemic barriers facing relatives/kin.

2022 Position Priorities:

- Designate state funding to support (formal) kinship care providers with respite care resources, leveraging federal child welfare funds as possible to be matched by state general fund resources for the purpose of providing access to respite care for all kinship caregivers across the state.
- Design a grant program to support recruitment of BIPOC families to become foster caregivers, using federal child welfare funds matched by state general fund dollars.
- Leveraging existing community, county and philanthropy resources, develop a MN model kinship navigator that draws on existing expertise and capacity within communities across the state to deliver Minnesota children, youth and families in need of kinship supports with the needed engagement and practical assistance to provide loving care to kin children until reunification or permanency occurs.
- Funding to support data collection and evaluation of the project to work towards gaining approval by the Prevention Services Clearinghouse.

Systemic Priority Alignment

(highlight all that apply and explain why)

- Equity
- Integrated Services
- Fiscal Framework

From the GARE Toolkit (See www.racialequityalliance.org): What are the racial equity impacts of this particular decision? Who will benefit from or be burdened by it? Are there strategies to mitigate unintended consequences?

Comments: This position recognizes the importance of children from the BIPOC community being served by providers of their same race and culture whenever a relative/kinship placement cannot be identified. It advocates for targeted recruitment efforts to increase providers from BIPOC Communities. The position also advocates for additional funding for resources and supports for relative/kin placements.

Creating a Kinship Navigation program across the continuum from informal kinship arrangements, formal kinship placements and post permanency creates equity to access necessary support services across the state for all kinship providers.

Relevant Committee

(highlight all that apply and explain why)

- Adult Services
- Behavioral Health
- Children's Services
- Equity
- Healthcare
- Modernization
- Policy
- Self-Sufficiency

Why:

Rationale/Background:

MN Counties value the placement of children with relatives whenever they cannot be with their parents. The state standard for relative placement is 35.7% and in 2021 the statewide outcome was 64.6%. This number has steadily increased over the years showing counties commitment to this practice. DHS Licensing reports that from 2015 to 2021 placement with kinship caregivers increased by 195%.

Funding is needed to support the recruitment of individuals for high quality foster care providers when relatives are not available. Specifically, there needs to be increased recruitment from members of the BIPOC community so that children of color can more frequently be placed in homes with providers of their race and culture. Placing children in culturally reflective and responsive homes may increase their feelings of belongingness, social connectedness, and ethnic-racial identity. One study found that cultural dissimilarity between children and their foster homes can lead to depression, loneliness, and behavior problems for children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Anderson & Linares, 2012).

There often is a significant disparity between the resources provided to traditional foster parents and what kinship caregivers receive. We support additional funding at the state level to help relative/kinship providers overcome barriers to licensing requirements as well as flex funding to meet initial placement needs prior to them receiving foster care maintenance payments. Statewide funding for this purpose would also make things more equitable across the state for relative/kinship caregivers. Caregivers who elect to participate in non-kin foster care have the advantage of months or years of planning before a child is placed in their care. However, kinship providers often step into the role of caregiver in emergency situations, without adequate time to prepare for a child's arrival. Caring for a relative child often means taking on unanticipated expenses, which can create new financial challenges or exacerbate existing ones. This is particularly true for grandparents, who are more likely to be on a fixed income. One study found that of the more than 2.5 million grandparents formally and informally caring for their grandchildren in the U.S., 20% lived in poverty, 25% had a disability, and 40% were over the age of 60. Regardless of their willingness, many relatives cannot financially afford to care for their kin in the child welfare system due to barriers relating to increased expense, decreased ability to participate in regular employment, structural housing and furniture needs (ie: larger vehicles, car seats, beds, and countless other items

required for full life in community and health and safety standards), in addition to the challenging family dynamics involved in caring for kin children who have been removed from parents. Alternately, we know that with appropriate support, kinship caregivers are uniquely positioned to care successfully for children and prevent adverse impacts of system involvement – when accessing meaningful support.

We support the development of a Kinship Navigation Program based on a Kin First Model that provides a continuum of care and includes supporting both informal and formal relative/kinship providers. MN currently does not have an approved Kinship Navigation Program that has been approved by the clearinghouse under the Family First Family Preservation Act creating a strong sense of urgency to create this now.



MACSSA
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Approved on: