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Relative—Kinship Foster Care: licensing and support for families

HF1424/SF1786

Relative-Kin Caregivers are the Primary Foster Caregivers in Minnesota

- Over 60% of Foster Care placements are with relative-kin caregivers, a significant change and achievement of MN counties to prioritize relative-kin caregivers. This change requires reexamination of our foster care system that was designed for traditional foster caregivers and needs to be updated to support relative-kin caregivers.
- National statistics demonstrate that when foster care is provided by relative-kin caregivers, children experience more positive outcomes in education, mental health and substance use. Cultural and family identity are sustained in the child's life and MN data demonstrates greater stability and fewer transitions for children with relative-kin, avoiding the trauma that moving homes and caregivers can have for a child and family.

Minnesota Relative-Kin Caregivers Experience Unnecessary Barriers

- A survey conducted in September, 2024 by Quality Parenting Initiative-MN of county and community-based foster care licensors indicated that the licensing process creates significant barriers and delays for families. *Positively*, based on new federal flexibilities announced by the Children's Bureau in 2023, states can now create a Kinship Licensing Standard to improve support for relative-kin caregivers.

A recently licensed relative caregiver observed, *"the most complicated part about foster care is not the difficult of upending my life to care for my relatives – it is dealing with your licensing paperwork"*

Kinship Licensing Working Group Established to Elevate Solutions

- State and county experts, community providers, advocates, leaders with lived experience participated in a working group from spring-fall 2024 to review new federal flexibilities and identify how Minnesota could create a more responsive process for relative-kin caregivers – with the goal of improving licensing timeframes from 6 months to one month to achieve licensure. Working group members also identified strategies to enhance stability for relative-kin caregivers. A final report outlined legislative recommendations:

Kinship Licensing and Support for Relative-Kin Caregivers, in HFXXXX/SFXXXX

- Establish process improvements to improve access to information, streamline required training, and update background study language that build efficiencies and timely access to licensing
- Support transparency and choice for relative-kin to fully understand options for the children in their care and options for licensing and family support
- Invest in the licensing and family support required to adequately meet the needs of relative-kin caregivers
- Support family preservation and prevent entry of families into child welfare by recognizing the role of informal relative-kin caregivers through targeted child and family anti-poverty strategies.

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