



KINSHIP CARE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE REPORT



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES



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Executive Summary

The annual Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC) report for September 2018 through August 2019 is required by RCW 74.13.621, and requires that “within existing resources, the department shall establish an oversight committee to monitor, guide, and report on kinship care recommendations and implementation activities.”¹ KCOC also functions to provide guidance to the legislature in identifying, supporting and strengthening kinship care families.

Kinship care includes relatives and unrelated kin who are raising children either temporarily or permanently. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and the Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Long Term Support Administration (AL TSA) and Economic Services Administration (ESA) staff participate in KCOC, with kinship caregivers, child and caregiver advocates, non-profit service providers, tribes and legal community representatives.

Introduction

KCOC meets quarterly, providing a forum to exchange information about state policy changes, local initiatives and concerns and to monitor, guide and report on kinship care recommendations and implementation activities.

Achievements this past year include:

- Legislation to create the Kinship Care Legal Aid Coordinator position
- Reauthorization of KCOC per RCW 74.13.621
- The 16th annual statewide Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives Contest Award Ceremony on July 9, 2019
- Kinship Navigator grant award from the federal Administration for Children and Families to DCYF to partner with AL TSA to support implementation of an evidence-based Kinship Navigator program as required under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and to build state infrastructure to support kin
- Development of a KCOC subcommittee to act in an advisory capacity for the Kinship Navigator grant
- Dissemination of information about changes to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and WorkFirst supports offered through ESA for which some kinship caregivers qualify

KCOC Activities

Kinship Care Legal Aid Coordinator

Passed in April and signed by Governor Inslee in May 2019, Senate Bill 5651 created a new Kinship Care Legal Aid Coordinator position within the office of civil legal aid. This position, which was recommended by KCOC in the 2018 report to the legislature, reflects recommendations to train attorneys included in the 2002 Kinship Care Workgroup report² to the legislature. The legal aid coordinator will consult with:

- KCOC,
- Washington State Supreme Court Access to Justice Board’s pro bono council,
- The Washington State Bar Association Moderate Means Program,
- DSHS-AL TSA, and
- The Office of Public Defense

Additionally, this individual is charged with developing local and regional kinship care initiatives and resources, providing kinship focused training to pro bono and low bono attorneys and providing a report to DCYF, DSHS and relevant legislative committees.

¹ [RCW 74.13.621](#)

² [2002 Kinship Care Workgroup Report \(DOC\)](#) to the Washington State Legislature

Reauthorization of KCOC Per RCW 74.13.621

Senate Bill 5651 reauthorized KCOC and removed the committee's expiration date. The reauthorization action is another change that KCOC has supported, and provides the opportunity for the oversight committee to continue activities in support of kinship caregivers.

16th Annual Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives Contest and Award Ceremony

Now in its 16th year, the Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives Contest and Award Ceremony³ includes poetry, drawing and essays written by children in kinship care. A celebration of winners and their families took place at the Governor's Mansion on July 9, 2019. KCOC members participate and support this annual contest, which honors children and youth who have or are experiencing kinship care as well as the relatives who are raising them.

Kinship Navigator Program Evaluation

DCYF, in collaboration with ALTSA and the University of Washington's Partners for Our Children (POC), requested and was awarded federal funds through the passage of the FFPSA to support implementation of an evidence-based Kinship Navigator program. FFPSA created opportunities for states and tribes to use Title IV-E matching funds for qualifying services aimed at prevention. One of the populations highlighted as needing support were kinship caregivers.

In order to use Title IV-E matching funds to support a Kinship Navigator program, the program must be evidence-based and included in the federal Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse. Currently, no Kinship Navigator programs meet the evidence-based standards. In May 2018, the United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) issued program instructions⁴ announcing a new opportunity for states to request funds. The funding provided resources for states to enhance, evaluate and develop Kinship Navigator programs that meet evidence-based standards required to draw down IV-E, 50 percent matching funds. Washington State is using these funds to strengthen and support evaluation of its Kinship Navigator program to work toward meeting the evidence standard.

A KCOC subcommittee was established to inform, guide and vet evaluation related materials. The subcommittee provided vital feedback that helped shape a needs assessment implemented in two Kinship Navigator pilot sites.

Dissemination of Information About Changes to Supports Offered Through the Economic Services Administration

Throughout the reporting period, DSHS ESA implemented legislative and policy changes that directly affect kinship families. To this end, ESA worked diligently to share information and counter misinformation during KCOC meetings. Changes implemented include:

Asset Limit Increase

Effective Feb. 1, 2019, resource limits for cash benefits increased. Increased resource limits allow applicants and recipients of cash benefits to save for emergencies and keep a reliable vehicle to get to and from appointments, school or work. The new limit for liquid resources increased from \$1,000 to \$6,000 and the new limit for vehicle equity increased from \$5,000 to \$10,000. With this increase, more kinship caregivers caring for children with assets will qualify for assistance.

Sibling Considerations

Effective Feb. 1, 2019, updates to Washington Administrative Code 388-408-0025 allow kinship caregivers to choose to exclude a sibling from the TANF grant if that child has income. This change allows caregivers to receive assistance for children with no income of their own.

³ [2019 Voice of Children booklet](#)

⁴ Program Instruction 18-05 entitled, [Fiscal Year 2018 Funding Available for Developing, Enhancing or Evaluating Kinship Navigator Programs \(PDF\)](#)

Cash Assistance Overpayments

Effective May 1, 2019, ESA no longer establishes cash overpayments for dependent children. This change supports the dependent child's financial well-being and prevents overpayments following children as they may move between kinship caregivers and their parents. ESA will establish an overpayment when a non-needy caretaker relative or guardian receives an overpayment on behalf of a dependent child. However, ESA will not use grant reductions to recover overpayments from non-needy caretaker relatives or guardians when the assessed overpayment was for a child who is not currently part of the assistance unit.

Second Substitute House Bill (2SHB) 1603

Effective July 28, 2019, 2nd Substitute House Bill (2SHB) 1603 includes a time limit extension for families experiencing homelessness. This means families that are currently homeless and have used up all 60 months of TANF assistance may now qualify for additional months of TANF. For purposes of this TANF program change, homelessness means:

- Living outside,
- Living in a building or other location not meant for human habitation,
- Living in a building or other location that you have no legal right to occupy,
- Living in an emergency shelter, or
- Living in a temporary housing program, which may include a transitional or supportive housing program with a limited duration of stay.

Additionally, 2SHB 1603 eliminated permanent disqualification from the TANF program due to reoccurring non-compliance with WorkFirst participation requirements. This means families who have struggled to meet participation requirements in the past, and as a result were permanently disqualified from receiving TANF and WorkFirst support services, may now reapply for TANF.

These changes promote financial and overall stability. Families who did not have the income or supports they need and who may have utilized a kinship arrangement in the past may no longer need to do so.

ESA provides cash assistance (child-only TANF grants) and food assistance. Recipients of child-only TANF are eligible for one-time (within the previous 12 months) emergency assistance for shelter-related expenses through the Additional Requirements for Emergent Needs (AREN) program.

In coordination with DCYF, ESA offers the Concurrent Benefits program for children temporarily placed in out-of-home care, allowing caregivers to receive a child-only TANF grant for a child, while a parent receives a TANF grant for themselves and their child during the reunification process.

The Future of KCOC

In the coming year, DCYF will partner with ALTA, ESA and KCOC to provide additional meeting resources and supports through DCYF's Community Engagement team.

In the past couple of years, the meetings have moved to a conference call without a defined membership. DCYF plans to support the kinship community in establishing a meeting structure that allows for different methods of participation and focuses on creating an environment conducive to creating solutions for the challenges faced by the kinship community. This includes establishing a roster of defined members that are representative of individuals and community providers that reflect the populations served.⁵ This intentional restructure also aligns with statutory requirements under Second Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 1661 requiring the department prioritize and address disproportionality and disparity in service delivery and outcomes. DCYF will engage the kinship community, agency partners and stakeholders when revising the membership to ensure members reflect Washington's regional, racial and cultural diversity.

⁵ Historically, communities of color, as in the foster care system, are over-represented in the kinship care population.