

MEDIA ADVISORY:



*Public policy
in the best interest
of children.*

When: Tuesday, February 28, 2017
Where: Speaker's Library, State Capitol, Lansing
When: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Interview opportunities with caregivers and lawmakers from 9:30 – 1:00 p.m.
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FamilySpeak: Raising the Voices of Caregivers from the Foster Care System

Numerous federal and state policymakers, and other advocacy partners will gather from 10 a.m.-noon in the speaker's library of the state Capitol on Tuesday, Feb. 28, to listen to caregivers in the child welfare system from around the state — including foster, adoptive and kinship parents — tell what had brought them into the system, how their expectations differed from their reality of parenting, their challenges, and to make recommendations for changes in policies and programs to make the system work better for their families and others.

To assist in the discussion will be co-hosts Reps. Jim Runestad and Robert Kosowski along with Michigan's Children, the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children and their families.

This FamilySpeak has been made possible by the voices of the families supported through the following partners:

The Adoptive Family Support Network (AFSN) serves as a clearinghouse for information useful to adoptive parents, a source of support to families facing adoption issues, and to advocate for families and for change in policy and practices that affect adoptive families. AFSN works closely with area adoption agencies and provides adoptive families links to the experts and each other.

Families on the Move, Inc. (FOTM) serves as a voice for Foster, Adoptive, Kinship and biological families statewide through advocacy, support services and reform to garner family support and stability. FOTM serves families through monthly parent support meetings, youth centered programs and individual assistance with system meetings and processes.

The Family Enrichment Center (FEC) is a non-profit organization serving Calhoun County. The FEC exists to fill the gaps of the child welfare system by providing training, support, mentoring and services to all families, with an emphasis on adoptive, foster and kinship families.

Fostering Forward Michigan (FFM) is a dynamic, statewide coalition of foster, adoptive and kinship families who actively engaged and provide direct support and service on a daily basis. The FFM community works to find solutions to the common and prevalent problems facing our families and actively advocates on behalf of our families on issues such as payments, services, permanency and equity.

The Kinship Care Resource Center (KCRC) is a non-profit statewide organization through the School of Social Work at Michigan State University. The KCRC supports Michigan kinship families by utilizing research to provide education and outreach for communities, agencies, and individuals involved in supporting kinship families.

The Michigan Statewide, Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Family Coalition is a statewide collaborative of families and organizations that encourages parent led mutual support by informing, educating and advocating for foster, adoptive and kinship families.

The Michigan Kinship Coalition is a group of caregivers and professional allies working with all kinship caregivers to inform and educate legislators; as well as work with organizations on kinship care issues to strengthen the kinship family unit, henceforth improving the lives of children.

Also supporting this FamilySpeak are the **Junior Leagues of Michigan** and the governmental consulting firm of **Kandler, Reed, Khoury and Muchmore**.

Michigan's Children's emphasis is on influencing public policies that close equity gaps and ensure that the children and youth who face the most challenges have the supports they need to succeed in school and life. By working to reform public policy, we improve the odds for all children, and support the work of those who provide services that help individual children overcome the odds. We have been creating opportunities for young people, parents and other community members to share their stories, concerns and suggestions directly with policymakers since 1996, and continue to find new ways to provide young people, families and the supporting professionals around them the tools that they need to advocate on their own behalf.

FamilySpeak, modeled after Michigan's Children's signature KidSpeak® forums, mimics a traditional legislative committee hearing. These forums provide a rare opportunity for families to speak directly to a Listening Panel composed of federal, state, county and city government representatives, as well as community and business leaders about barriers that they face to assist the children in their care. In addition, these families provide decision-makers with suggestions for change. Connecting the experiences of families directly with policymakers has provided firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities and has proven to be an effective advocacy strategy. Their voices have changed the trajectory of policy conversation and have resulted in additional champions for parent-driven solutions in the Legislature, several Departments and other local policymaking bodies.