



October 9, 2020

To: Governor Whitmer
From: Matt Gillard, President/CEO
RE: Support for Kinship Caregivers – Veto of HB 5443

We were shocked and disappointed to learn of your veto of the Kinship Caregiver Advisory Council Act, HB 5443, that we and so many others had worked hard to develop and then pass through both Legislative chambers with exceptional bi-partisan support. This legislation had all of the critical elements that we want for good policymaking:

1. It was borne from constituent need. A group of relative caregivers came to their local Representatives with a concern. They contended that there wasn't enough attention paid to or support given a key group of people caring for some of our state's most vulnerable children while often supporting their parents and others key adults in their lives through difficult circumstances in order to keep families together.
2. It was vetted thoroughly by a host of stakeholders, including your office, and was fully supported by the Department charged with its implementation.
3. It was passed overwhelmingly in both the House and Senate.
4. It was funded through an appropriation for the current fiscal year.

Then, it was vetoed by your office, with no notice – truly a surprise for everyone involved.

We aren't going to try to debate the issue of authority between the Governor and the Senate in these bills, that is not what we would like to discuss with you. We are interested to know what you are now going to do moving forward, and how we and the many relative caregivers and their program and other allies with whom we partner, can help.

Is there a plan in place to support another mechanism for this Advisory Council function within the DHHS? Is there a plan to expand and sustain kinship care navigation functions beyond what is required under federal law?

You have indicated publicly that you are willing to work to continue to move this forward, and we want to express the need for urgency. Despite competing priorities, we know that the current health crisis has exposed so many vulnerabilities for families of all sorts, and that now is the time to move to prioritize relative caregivers and the children and youth in their care. A comprehensive Advisory Council, as expressed in this legislation, can help engage the kinds of partners necessary, including caregivers themselves; and examine the kinds of data and research necessary to make investment, policy and program adjustments with the likelihood to assist.

The many kinship caregivers in this state are relying on your swift response to correct what has been lost in your recent action. We look forward to any opportunity to work with you on this in the coming weeks.

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