

June 1, 2021

### **Supporting Kin and Relative Caregivers in the Michigan State Budget**

Many children and youth in Michigan are raised by grandparents, aunts and uncles, older siblings, and other relatives when their own parents are unwilling or unable to care for them. In some situations, this “kinship care” is informally arranged. There is ample evidence showing that in many circumstances, children thrive in the stable environments created through kinship care, which is why child welfare systems have stated priorities that include placing children with suitable relatives when possible.

In Michigan, over 4,000 children live with a relative who is a licensed foster parent, and according to Generations United, it is estimated that more than ten times that many children outside the foster care system live with a grandparent or other relative. However, due to the lack of state attention to supporting this population, the full picture of Michigan children in informal living arrangements with relatives, including their needs and service barriers, is not well known.

In the 2019-2020 legislative session, bi-partisan legislation that would have created a state-level kinship advisory council passed both the State House and State Senate with overwhelming support from both legislators and the Department of Health and Human Services but was vetoed by the Governor. The creation of a kinship advisory council, the first formal policymaking space for informal caregivers in state history, would help reshape how the state of Michigan supports relative and kin caregivers.

**Current Situation: The House of Representatives budget for the 2021-22 Fiscal Year includes boilerplate language mirroring past proposals to create both a kinship advisory council as well as funding for a navigator program. The Senate budget contains no such provisions. While budget boilerplate does not offer the same long-term guarantee of stability as statute, this proposal would jump-start the creation of a Kinship Advisory Council and Navigator program in Michigan.**

#### Recommendations

- **Support the House proposal to create a Kinship Advisory Council within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services**
- **Support the House proposal to provide funding for a kinship navigator program.**