

Dear Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_\_:

As Michigan makes critical decisions about the wellbeing of children, youth and families this summer we can't forget about the longstanding issues that kinship/relative caregivers and families are facing. The success of these families and caregivers is essential to helping them support the mental and physical health and overall wellbeing of over 52,000 kids in Michigan. Whether in formal or informal care, children should be supported.

We know that children enter into kinship care based on a variety of reasons out of their individual control- death of a parent, incarceration, poverty, substance abuse, etc. What is critically important is that we prioritize this population and their caregivers in child welfare conversations. Leaving them behind would only exacerbate the challenges of an already vulnerable population and prevent them from taking advantage of the opportunities that lie before them.

As your constituents, we urge you to move quickly to introduce and pass the Michigan Kinship Navigator Bill and the Michigan Kinship Advisory Bill. The Kinship Advisory Council Bill would establish an advisory council within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to advise on kinship related care and issues. Supported with wide bipartisan support, the Council would be a voice for children in care and help to better inform policy and practice for kinship families across the state. The Kinship Navigator Bill would create and sustain through appropriation, a statewide Navigator Program to support kinship families through education, research, and best practice. It would serve as a reference point for families in the formal care system.

As the state looks more to kinship families for placement, these policy issues will become even more necessary to support families and caregivers.

Both bills were passed last legislative session with broad bipartisan support but were vetoed on a partisan divide over advice and consent. The families that would be positively impacted cannot afford another opportunity for the ball to be dropped before crossing the finish line.

To build a better system of care, and to ensure kids grow up healthy and able to face life independently, the families raising them need to be better equipped to meet these challenges. This legislation was created to get a handle on how to help kinship/relative caregivers and we need your support.

We encourage the Executive Office and the State Legislature to work together to pass these two pieces of critical legislation.

Sincerely,

*The Michigan Kinship Care Coalition is an inclusive network of voices collaborating to strengthen and increase support for kinship families through advocacy, increased education, and raised awareness to equip all families to thrive.*

*Our vision is to bring together diverse allies to ensure all kinship families have access to the support they need to provide a vibrant future for the children in their care.*