

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS SHEILA KUEHL AND
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June 9, 2015

SUPPORTING OUR RELATIVE CAREGIVERS

Of the roughly 18,000 children in out-of-home care in Los Angeles County, about 52 percent are in relative placements, commonly known as kinship care. This figure does not include informal arrangements in which extended family members raise children without the involvement of child protective services. Though there is no definitive data, it is estimated that this population may be six times larger than those relatives involved with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

Kinship placements have achieved great benefits, including continuity of family identification and knowledge, consistency of cultural, ethnic and religious values, and connection to community. As a result, children living with relatives have been shown to have better educational, health and behavioral outcomes than those in traditional foster care or group homes.¹ They also experience greater placement stability and move more quickly toward all forms of permanency.

This is true despite the fact that family caregivers are typically older, lower-income, less likely to have health coverage and less educated, and receive less government support than traditional foster caregivers.² They are less likely than foster parents to have peer support groups, to have respite care or to receive training or

¹ Sakai, Christina MD, Hua Lin, PhD, and Glenn Flores, MD, *Health Outcomes and Family Services in Kinship Care: Analysis of a National Sample of Children in the Child Welfare System*. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine 165 (No.2) (2011): 159-165. www.archpediatrics.com

² *Stepping Up for Kids*, Annie E Casey Foundation, Policy Report, Kids Count, 2012.

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financial support to care for a child.³ Research shows caregiving grandparents have high rates of depression and frequently exhibit multiple chronic health problems.

Effective June 1, 2015, Los Angeles County put an end to the long-time financial disparity between relative caregivers eligible for federal assistance and those who are not. In response to a motion introduced by Supervisors Kuehl and Knabe on March 3, 2015, kinship caregivers are now eligible to receive payment equal to the basic foster care rate under the Approved Relative Caregiver (ARC) program. While this is a significant achievement, it takes more than financial support to care for the needs of abused or neglected children who have been removed from their homes.

As the largest public child welfare agency in the country, DCFS operates two countywide Kinship Centers where relatives can access specialized kinship services. In addition, four DCFS Kinship Division staff are dedicated to supporting 18 Regional Offices. These same staff are also out-stationed at Edelman Children's Court and partner with community-based organizations (CBOs) like Raising our Children's Kids (ROCK) in the Antelope Valley. Unfortunately, four staff cannot come close to meeting the countywide needs of over 9,000 children living with relatives. Consistent with the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission, DCFS surveys of kinship caregivers and input from key community stakeholders, it is imperative that DCFS ensure greater support for relative caregivers.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), in consultation with the Interim Chief Executive Officer, the Office of Child Protection, and the Departments of Public Social Services (DPSS) and Community and Senior Services (CSS), to report back on all of the following in time for inclusion in the FY 2015-16 Supplemental Changes to the Budget:

1. DCFS shall report back on the programs and services (including DPSS and CSS programs) provided to relative caregivers, as well as an analysis of the gaps where additional support is needed from both countywide and regional perspectives.
2. Using the solicitation process for the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project as a model, DCFS shall issue a Request for Information to partner

³ Sakai.

with community-based organizations (one in each Supervisorial District) to develop Kinship Support programs, and allocate up to \$1.25 million annually from its existing budget to contract with qualified CBOs for these purposes. While each program would be different to meet the unique needs of each community, funds will allow providers to establish and operate the program, including staffing, space for out-stationing DCFS staff onsite partial time, program activities, as well as direct support for families in need. Appropriate community-based providers must be able to demonstrate robust experience in the past five years in prevention and after care services, as well as experience in Family Visitation Center models. Providers will offer services including, but not limited to:

- Emergency needs assessments and support (such as food, transportation and other emergency need vouchers)
 - Respite care and child care linkages
 - Systems navigation and collaboration with other local agencies (such as courts, schools and County departments)
 - Space for visitation
 - Support groups, training and orientations
 - Educational advocacy, guidance and referrals for tutoring
 - Legal assistance
 - Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) home assessment support
 - Live Scan, health and mental health services and other social services referrals
 - Assistance with eligibility for government benefits (ARC, AB 12, Cal Fresh, CalWORKS, Family Caregiver Support Program, housing and others)
 - Family support services, including activities to support economic stability and increase social connections among caregiving families
3. DCFS shall report back on the volume and types of calls (e.g., referrals from the State Ombudsman, foster parents, birth parents or other types of caregivers) received by the DCFS Ombudsman in calendar year 2014.
 4. DCFS shall report back on the feasibility of establishing a 24/7 Caregiver Call

Center within its existing budget to support the needs of relative and foster caregivers or birth parents. Such a Call Center should work closely with other County departments and the Kinship Support programs, once established.

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