



**TESTIMONY FOR THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE  
HEARING ON THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED  
HUMAN SERVICES BUDGET**

***IMPROVING SERVICES FOR INFORMAL KINSHIP  
CAREGIVERS AND THE CHILDREN IN THEIR CARE***

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FEBRUARY 9, 2016**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction to Kinship Care Issues</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>NYS Kinship Care Population by County (Column 6)</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Summary Profile of Kinship Care Families</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Recommendation One: Stabilize and Increase Funding for Kinship Families</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Recommendation Two: Pass Resolution: September as Kinship Care Month</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Recommendation Three: Fund a Study on Barriers Faced by Kinship Families</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Recommendation Four: Move Funding for the KinGAP Program from the Foster Care Block Grant to the Adoption Subsidies Cost Center</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Appendix A: Profile of Kinship Families: Causes, Circumstances, Outcomes</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Appendix B: Cost Analysis: Kinship Program and Foster Care</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Appendix C: OCFS Local Kinship Programs FY2015-16</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Appendix D: Selected Bibliography</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Appendix E: Organizations Supporting Increase in Funding</b>	<b>21</b>

### **Introduction to Kinship Care Issues**

The NYS Kinship Navigator is an Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) administered program, operated by Catholic Family Center of Rochester. Since 2006, the Navigator has provided assistance to informal kinship caregivers across New York State via its toll-free help line and its website. The Governor flat lines the Navigator, proposing \$220,500 in funding (Aid to Localities p. 248).

The recommendations herein are based upon the Kinship Navigator's database (containing over 11,000 kinship caregivers), the advice of kinship service providers from across the state, four KinCare Summit reports, and the preliminary findings of the Navigator's three-year federal Children's Bureau demonstration project and its evaluation.

Kinship care refers to non-parents - relatives, predominantly grandparents, and family friends - who care for children when parents are unable or unwilling to act as parents.

Kinship care is an important resource for New York State's vulnerable children. Given the evidence that children live with kin for similar reasons as to why they enter foster care (parental neglect and safety concerns) and given special needs of these children (disabilities, trauma, loss) and their caregivers (old age, poor health, poverty), New York needs to recognize the needs of these families and evolve its system of kinship services into a comprehensive model program that serves kinship children and their families across the entire state, and that addresses the persisting barriers to their success.

The U.S. Census and Center for Disease Control estimate that 3% of all children in the U.S. (2.3 million) are in non-parental care, indicating children living without parents. Nationwide, 87% of these children are living with kinship caregivers who do not receive foster care benefits. Over 60% of kinship families live under 200% of federal poverty guideline.

In New York, more than 130,000 families are grandparent-headed households where grandparents are primary caregivers. Annie E. Casey conservatively estimates that more than 150,000 children are living with relatives, with less than 5% of these children in foster care. Higher estimates, based upon Census data and the fact that grandparents make up 59% of non-parent care, indicate up to 218,000 caregivers. See county population table page 6 and profiles page 7, 13-17. Nearly one-third of children in non-parental care have special health care needs, and many of these children also have higher mental health needs. Below are tables and references that profile kinship families.

Kinship families have long labored far from the spotlight, while protecting children at risk, healing children with trauma, and persisting through a thicket of legal, social, and family obstacles. Caregivers and advocates have called for action to support these families. New York has responded with assistance and services, despite state fiscal restraints. However, the recognition that all types of kinship families are an integral part of the state's child welfare system hasn't completely happened, and policies supportive of informal kinship families are often difficult to find within the plans of many state agencies.

There are very good reasons to support these families. They are the only large-scale resource for vulnerable children, **they get better outcomes for young people, and they are less expensive than foster care.** The reasons for their success are clear. Extended families are highly motivated to go the distance and address any challenges that arise over a long period of time. Most of kinship care is done by grandparents, and a grandparent's love is the cure for many ills.

For the non-foster care kinship families, the primary source of financial assistance is a federal Non-Parent Caregiver TANF Grant. According to Chapin Hall study, only 15% of eligible NYS kinship families are receiving this assistance. There are other anomalies in the supports for kinship families, particularly related to access to foster care and to the courts. A review of causes of kinship care shows the dire situations faced by kinship children. Clearly, their circumstances parallel those of foster children, yet this community has only a fraction of the resources available, and often faces barriers to entering foster care.

What follows are four recommendations - three are budget related. For further information and in depth recommendations, please review the four KinCare Summit reports and other reports, available on the Kinship Navigator website at Kinship Policy/Practice Resources, [www.nysnavigator.org](http://www.nysnavigator.org)



## NYS Kinship Care by County (Column Six Estimated Total Number of Kinship Families in NYS)

County	Population (ACS 2006-2010)	Population Under 18 (ACS 2006-2010)	Grandparent Householders Responsible for Grandchildren (ACS 2006-2010)	Non-Grandparent Caregivers	Estimated All Non-Parent Caregivers	Approved Kinship Foster Families (2012)	N Docket - (Direct) Custody	OTDA Non-Parent Grant Type 1 Cases	Kinship Families No Foster Care or OTDA Type 1 Grant	Percent of Kinship Families Not Receiving Assistance
NYS	19,303,733	4,307,867	131,108	87,405	218,513	5,183	1590	18,066	195,264	89.36%
Albany	304,102	60,516	1,036	691	1,727	13	31	337	1,377	79.73%
Allegany	49,030	10,590	299	199	498	11	6	66	421	84.55%
Broome	200,745	40,550	1,406	937	2,343	11	0	490	1,842	78.62%
Cattaraugus	80,494	18,836	589	393	982	9	12	124	849	86.45%
Cayuga	80,211	17,326	454	303	757	8	20	106	643	84.93%
Chautauqua	135,065	29,444	1,051	701	1,752	14	0	250	1,488	84.93%
Chemung	88,725	19,874	803	535	1,338	8	2	199	1,131	84.53%
Chenango	50,790	11,529	304	203	507		3	108	399	78.68%
Clinton	82,265	15,877	623	415	1,038	4	14	192	842	81.12%
Columbia	63,116	12,813	377	251	628	13	9	68	547	87.11%
Cortland	49,396	10,423	423	282	705	2	20	74	629	89.22%
Delaware	48,126	9,433	158	105	263	6	16	87	170	64.68%
Dutchess	296,910	65,914	1,819	1,213	3,032	28	21	264	2,740	90.37%
Erie	919,519	198,616	5,265	3,510	8,775	7	263	1,543	7,225	82.34%
Essex	39,405	7,605	135	90	225	1	0	39	185	82.22%
Franklin	51,731	10,760	278	185	463	9	12	47	407	87.91%
Fulton	55,556	12,333	571	381	952	1	0	69	882	92.64%
Genesee	59,970	13,253	358	239	597		5	40	557	93.30%
Greene	49,333	9,521	267	178	445	20	7	44	381	85.62%
Hamilton	4831	792	24	16	40		0	4	36	90.00%
Herkimer	64,429	14,303	522	348	870	7	34	119	744	85.52%
Jefferson	115,546	29,464	748	499	1,247	1	26	159	1,087	87.17%
Lewis	26,999	6,669	163	109	272		6	35	237	87.12%
Livingston	65,463	13,224	277	185	462	2	5	71	389	84.19%
Madison	73,228	15,964	479	319	798	7	0	78	713	89.35%
Monroe	742,931	168,645	4,740	3,160	7,900	1	52	1,231	6,668	84.41%
Montgomery	50,067	11,766	318	212	530	1	4	70	459	86.60%
Nassau	1,332,821	310,547	5,790	3,860	9,650	27	7	558	9,065	93.94%
Niagara	216,127	46,467	1,226	817	2,043	18	50	368	1,657	81.11%
Oneida	234,649	51,388	1,480	987	2,467	44	0	307	2,116	85.77%
Onondaga	465,436	107,050	2,895	1,930	4,825	10	1	786	4,029	83.50%
Ontario	107,211	24,122	290	193	483	5	1	165	313	64.83%
Orange	371,878	101,151	2,539	1,693	4,232	69	27	296	3,867	91.37%
Orleans	43,028	9,552	482	321	803	1	16	124	678	84.44%
Oswego	122,178	28,223	1,042	695	1,737	3	7	196	1,538	88.54%
Otsego	62,358	11,661	364	243	607		5	61	546	89.95%
Putnam	99,639	23,614	251	167	418	2	5	25	391	93.55%
Rensselaer	159,156	33,900	836	557	1,393	9	14	172	1,212	87.01%
Rockland	308,749	86,758	1,468	979	2,447	9	13	157	2,281	93.22%
St. L.	111,916	23,838	757	505	1,262	15	17	114	1,133	89.78%
Saratoga	218,631	49,629	1,000	667	1,667		4	143	1,524	91.42%
Schenectady	154,100	35,289	780	520	1,300	11	58	287	1,002	77.08%
Schoharie	32,796	6,526	442	295	737		3	40	697	94.57%
Schuyler	18,330	3,886	62	41	103		0	40	63	61.29%
Seneca	35,285	7,516	272	181	453	2	0	33	418	92.28%
Steuben	98,868	23,135	975	650	1,625	3	27	114	1,508	92.80%
Suffolk	1,487,286	356,949	7,401	4,934	12,335	162	250	962	11,211	90.89%
Sullivan	77,634	17,623	502	335	837		0	154	683	81.59%
Tioga	51,261	11,995	383	255	638		9	139	499	78.22%
Tompkins	101,167	16,591	350	233	583	45	10	90	448	76.86%
Ulster	182,749	36,915	1,007	671	1,678	20	30	247	1,411	84.09%
Warren	65,746	13,544	440	293	733	4	1	60	669	91.27%
Washington	63,206	13,336	548	365	913	2	1	88	823	90.15%
Wayne	93,712	22,303	565	377	942	3	8	118	821	87.15%
Westchester	944,064	226,575	4,334	2,889	7,223	60	71	518	6,645	92.00%
Wyoming	42,215	8,696	182	121	303		4	40	263	86.81%
Yates	25,331	6,206	168	112	280	7	2	55	218	77.86%
New York City	8,128,223	1,756,836	68,790	45,860	114,650	4,468	381	5,695	104,487	91.14%
Bronx	1,375,469	365,875	16,268	10,845	27,113				27,113	
Kings	2,485,484	589,060	24,612	16,408	41,020				41,020	
New York	1,585,717	234,686	9,520	6,347	15,867				15,867	
Queens	2,214,877	458,480	15,611	10,407	26,018				26,018	
Richmond	466,676	108,736	2,779	1,853	4,632				4,632	

## Summary NYS Profile of Kinship Care

### Caregivers

- U. S. Census consistently shows about 140,000 New York grandparents who are primary caregivers of children
- Grandparents make up approximately 60% of all non-parent caregivers of children (Interagency Forum)
- Study on stress of kinship caregivers found close to 40% of caregivers have clinically high levels of stress (Center for Human Services Research [CHSR])
- Causes of kinship care are similar to causes of foster care (see Reasons page 14).

### Children

- One in ten of all children will live with a grandparent or other relative caregiver during their childhood (Annie E. Casey, 2013)
- One in five of all black children will live with a grandparent or other relative caregiver during their childhood (Annie E. Casey, 2013)
- According to NYS Kinship Navigator data, kinship families average 1.6 children per household
- Despite the challenges, kinship children do as well or better on many well-being measures in comparison to foster children (Rubin, 2008)
- In a survey of 459 informal kinship children in five upstate counties, 86% had child protective services investigations.

### Financial Profile

- In a sample of income of 282 families from five upstate counties, 39% had income below \$19,000 (see Income page 15)
- About 15% of kinship children receive non-parent (child-only) financial benefits (Chapin Hall).



### **Recommendation One: Stabilize and Increase Funding to Serve Kinship Families**

New York State funds a statewide Kinship Navigator (KN) and 13 local kinship services providers covering 17 counties, administered by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). NYC's Department for the Aging operates the Grandparent Resource Center.

Given the great number of kinship caregivers who are not receiving supportive services, there is a need to serve more kinship families by increasing referrals to and from kinship services and by improving access to services provided by other public and private agencies. Responsibility for meeting these needs primarily falls to local kinship services in the seventeen counties with services and to the Kinship Navigator in forty-five counties without kinship services.

**The Governor's proposed budget provides \$338,750 for OCFS kinship programs and \$220,500 for the Kinship Navigator.**

#### **A System of Care for Kinship Families: New Direction for New York State**

A system of care for kinship families addresses service gaps and establishes New York State as a model system in kinship care. Building on the Kinship Navigator's current statewide information and referral network and local kinship services and KN's federal demonstration project, this unified system envisions the Kinship Navigator operating a statewide information/referral center and an information/resource network center, and local service agencies providing case management and individualized supports in selected communities across the state. The specific objectives of the system are to:

- reach more kinship families in communities where there are no local kinship services,
- connect more caregivers to kinship services in counties where there are kinship services,
- connect kinship families to other existing service systems,
- strengthen collaborations with state and local agencies (especially DSS's), and
- continue strategic planning and actions to move towards a comprehensive child welfare/kinship care system.

#### **Recommended Actions**

To implement a system of care for kinship families in FY2015-16, we request the following:

- Increase the statewide Kinship Navigator's funding for its Rochester information/referral center and its Albany resource/system network center by **\$100,000** to \$320,500 (from \$220,500; note that originally the Navigator was funded at \$250,000). The information/referral center focus includes its help line, web services, and client advocacy; the resource/system network center's focuses on identifying new resources, collaborations with public and private agencies, system coordination, and strategic development. Both centers implement recommended elements from the federal demonstration project. **Total = \$320,500**. See Appendix E for a list of supporting organizations.
- Increase OCFS funding, starting with Governor's proposed \$330,750, adding the same increase as last year's legislative **add (\$1,000,000) plus \$1,361,000. Total = \$2,691,750**. The increase will add \$47,000 to each of the 13 local programs and also permit funding of five new programs.

## **Recommendation Two: Declare September as Kinship Care Month**

In the 2014 and 2015 sessions, both the Assembly and Senate passed resolutions that declared September as Kinship Care Month. Governor Cuomo also issued declarations. Six other states have issued declarations, and last September 30th, the U. S. Senate passed a resolution. In other states and at the federal level, New York's resolution is being used as a model for other states.

Showing support for our grandparents and other caregivers is good policy. It is also a recognition of the important part of our cultural and national traditions. George and Martha Washington raised two grandchildren, Eleanor Parke Custis and George Washington Parke Custis. They were the first and only children to live in the presidential homes in New York and Philadelphia. Maya Angelou, Sandra Day O'Conner, as well as President Barack Obama and numerous others throughout history spent time in the care of their grandparents.

Bringing attention to the existence of this population and to its needs, and expressing appreciation for their sacrifices, should be a yearly event. New York should once again adopt resolutions declaring September as Kinship Care Month.



### **Recommendation Three: Fund a Study on Barriers Faced by Kinship Caregivers**

Kinship families face barriers to success that compound the special challenges inherent to their difficult role as caregivers of vulnerable children. The barriers have been well documented in four KinCare Summit reports, as well as reports by the New York City KinCare Task Force, AARP, and the Kinship Navigator. These reports are available at Kinship Policy/Practice Resources at [www.nysnavigator.org](http://www.nysnavigator.org)

The reports describe legislative actions, as well as agency actions. However, the voices of kinship families need a strong champion, and the Legislature itself should engage vigorously on this issue.

In 2014, the Legislature funded \$200,000 for a grandparent housing study. While kinship advocates applaud the intention, the study missed an opportunity to address the larger issues faced by kinship families.

In Appendix B page 18, an excerpt from the 2011 KinCare Summit report breaks down the cost of kinship programs and the non-parent grant compared to the cost of foster care. A Legislative analysis would more rigorously define the relative costs.

In Appendix D, the selected bibliography exemplifies the depth of research on kinship and the need to examine and apply the lessons learned.

It is time for these families to be heard by the Legislature. From Buffalo to Brooklyn, there are caregivers in every community who deserve to be heard. A study and hearings that focus on the needs of kinship families, and that identifies barriers, is a necessary step towards development of a comprehensive policy that supports kinship families.

**Recommendation Four: Move Funding for the KinGAP Program from the Foster Care Block Grant to the Adoption Subsidies Cost Center**

In 2010, the Legislature took the lead in approving a kinship guardianship assistance program (KinGAP), which allowed kinship foster parents who were close relatives to agree to take legal guardianship of their young grandchildren, nieces, and nephews in foster care under some well-defined criteria (See Social Services Law Section 458-a-f). Kinship children could then leave foster care, and their caregivers could receive a stipend similar to their foster care payments. For some families, this option is preferable to adoption because it allows the caregiver to maintain their familial role (staying grandma instead of adopting and becoming mom), and it does not force the termination of parent's rights. It has worked well to provide some children with a permanent long-term family committed to them.

When this was first approved in 2010, the short-term expedient was to fund KinGAP within the Foster Care Block grant. The problem is that the Foster Care Block grant is a fixed amount of money each county receives to cover foster care costs. However, KinGAP costs are designed to continue for several years, which drains funds which the county needs to support each year's foster care costs. This funding mechanism inhibits counties from proceeding with some KinGAP decisions, as shown by the low number reported each year by the Office of Children and Family Services in its report to the Governor.

The better course is to treat KinGAP in the same way the system treats adoption subsidy costs. The Legislature should move KinGAP funding to the adoption subsidy costs center. That is fair to the state, to the counties, and mostly to these families who deserve our support.

**KinGAP eligibility is limited to kinship foster parents. In NYS, there are approximately 5,000 kinship foster families in any given year.**

## Appendix A: Profile Of New York Kinship Caregivers

Kinship care refers to non-parents, mostly grandparents, caring for children. Over 95% of kinship care is informal (private) care, not foster care.

The U.S. Census and Center for Disease Control estimate that 3% of all children in the U.S. (2.3 million) are in non-parental care, meaning children living without parents. Nationwide, 87% of these children are living with kinship caregivers who do not receive foster care benefits. Over 60% of kinship families live under 200% of federal poverty guideline.

Kinship families have long labored far from the spotlight, while protecting children at risk, healing children with trauma, and persisting through a thicket of legal, social, and family obstacles. Caregivers and advocates have called for action to support these families. New York has responded with assistance and services. However, while the NYS Office of Children and Family Services is increasingly supportive of kinship families, policies supportive of informal kinship families are often difficult to find within the plans of many state agencies.

These families face daunting obstacles. Their children have many of the same problems faced by foster children, including maltreatment, trauma, and loss. Additionally, the caregivers are older and poorer, and they must manage the intergenerational issues associated with the parents' failure to parent successfully.

There are very good reasons to support kinship families. They are the only large-scale resource for vulnerable children, they get better outcomes for young people, and they are less expensive than foster care. The reasons for their success are clear. Extended families are highly motivated to go the distance and address any challenges that arise over a long period of time. Most of kinship care is done by grandparents, and a grandparent's love is the cure for many ills.



### Kinship Families in New York State

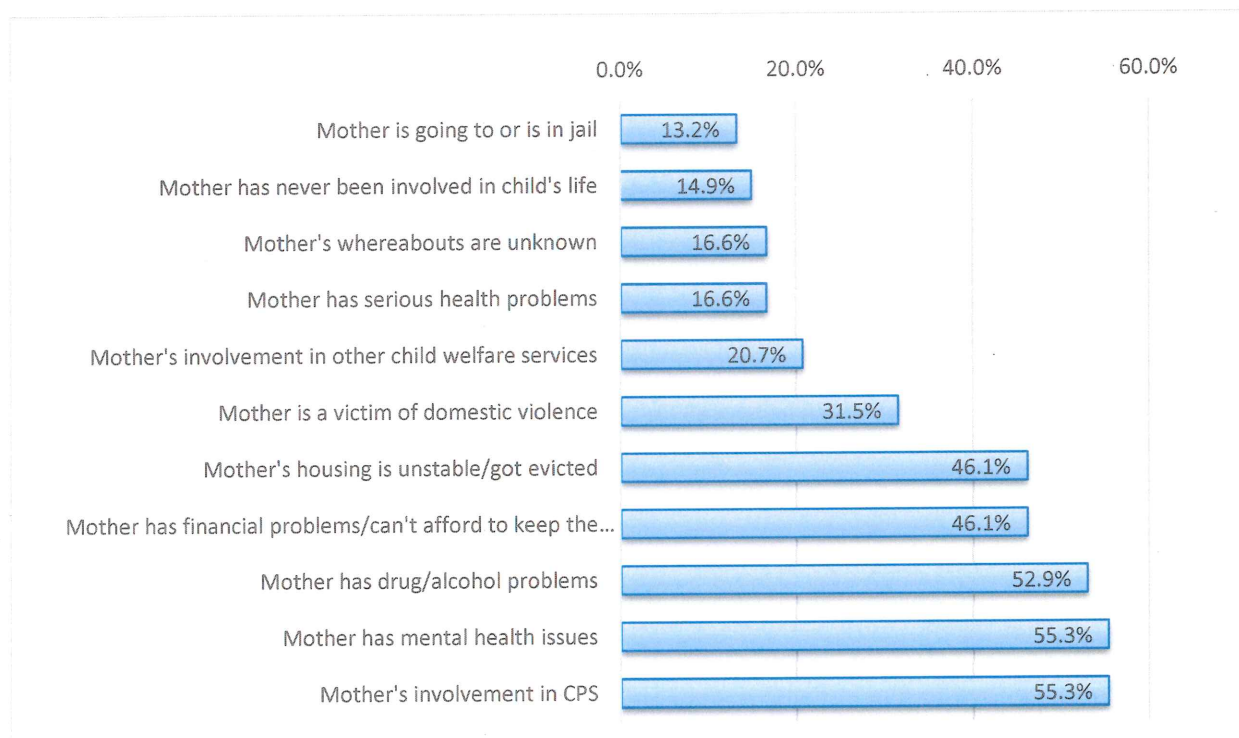
Kinship care is defined as grandparents, relatives, and family friends who are raising children when parents are unable to continue parenting. In New York State, estimates vary, from a low of 120,000 to a high 218,000 kinship families.

According to 2012 OCFS data, there were 5,183 "approved" kinship foster homes; the number of "certified" kinship foster homes is only recently subject to data collection, and so far OCFS has not released data. However, in general, most kinship foster homes are "approved" and the number of "certified" is not expected to exceed 1,000.

As part of its three year Children's Bureau kinship navigator demonstration project, the Kinship Navigator's evaluator, the Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) at the U. at Albany, surveyed a cohort of 303 kinship families from five upstate counties: Tioga, Broome, Orange, Ulster, and Dutchess. The survey included access to child welfare data.

The below information profiles the reasons for care, income, involvement of Child Protective Services, and well-being of caregivers and children. The first two tables are CHSR study.

### Reasons for Kinship Care



The entire informal kinship community is an integral part of the child welfare response, as shown by the high rates of involvement with CPS and the associated causes for informal care. These families provide invaluable assistance to vulnerable children and should be viewed as an



essential part of the child welfare effort to provide stable and loving homes for children whose parents are no longer able to provide care.

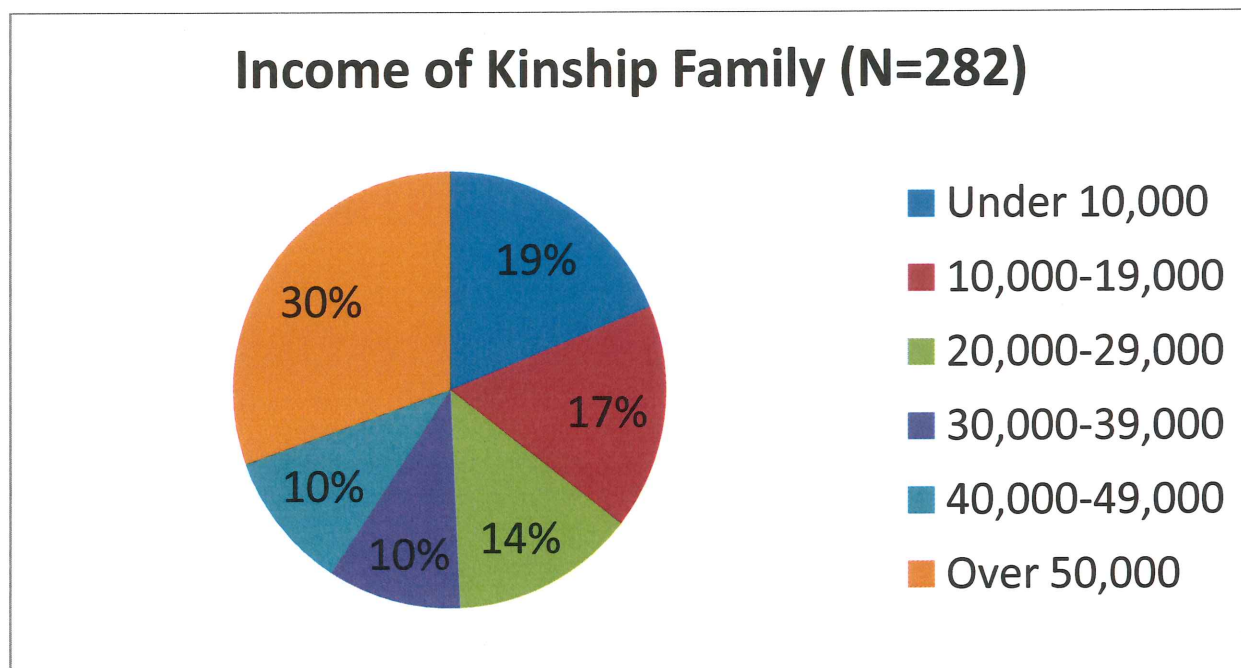
### Child Protective Services Investigations

According to an ongoing Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) study, of the 303 kinship caregivers surveyed; the study found:

- 459 kinship children were in the care of the 303 kinship caregivers.
  - The children were in informal kinship care at the time of survey (2013-2014)
  - Their case records were matched against state administrative records
- Out of the 459 children, 395 (86%) have child protective services investigations.

All of the surveyed kinship families were participants in the Kinship Navigator's demonstration project. None were foster families.

### Income of Kinship Families



### Other Data

Additionally, the CHSR study also showed that 40% of caregivers have clinically high levels of stress.

From an Annie E. Casey brief: one in ten of all children will live with a grandparent or other relative caregiver during their childhood, and one in five of all black children will live with a grandparent or other relative caregiver during their childhood (Annie E. Casey, 2013).

### From the Center for Disease Control

Children in Non-Parental Care: Findings from The 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health, Report on Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Office of Human Services Policy, HHS (Excerpts)

“10% of children in non-parental care have depression or anxiety disorders, compared with 6% of children living with one biological parent and 3% of children living with both biological parents” (Bramlett & Radel, 2014, p. 6).

“Compared with children living with two biological parents, children in non-parental care were about 1.5 times as likely to be living in a household in which it was often difficult to afford basics, five times as likely to have ever lived with a mentally ill caregiver or parent, six times as likely to have witnessed neighborhood violence, 15 times as likely to have witnessed caregiver or parent violence, 11 times as likely to have lived with a caregiver or parent with an alcohol or drug problem, and 17 times as likely to have experienced caregiver or parent incarceration” (Bramlett & Radel, 2014, p. 8).

“While Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) participation may seem relatively high for those living with neither parent – 23% of children in these households receive that benefit – considering that nearly all children living apart from their parents are eligible for TANF “child-only” payments (Ehrle & Geen, 2002), the proportion receiving benefits is actually quite low” (Bramlett & Radel, 2014, p. 11).

### Children have significantly higher rates than two-parent or one-parent households:

- TANF receipt
- Child does not have excellent or very good dental health
- Child has special health care needs
- All child mental health conditions
- Child's receipt of mental health care
- Reliance on public health insurance
- Repeated grades
- Poor school engagement
- Child has an IFSP/IEP (special education plan)
- Poor caregiver/child communication
- AFE: Caregiver death
- AFE: Witnessed caregiver violence
- AFE: Witnessed neighborhood violence
- AFE: Lived with someone with a mental illness

- AFE: Parent/guardian incarceration
- AFE: Lived with someone with an alcohol/drug problem

\*AFE = Adverse Family Experiences (Bramlett & Radel, 2014, p. 10-11)

“The very high rates of adverse family experiences among children in non-parental care suggest that parental substance abuse, mental health problems, domestic violence and incarceration form a cluster of factors that pervade the lives of children who have been separated from their parents. The cumulative trauma that these circumstances represent could have long-term implications for the health and well-being of these children over the life course” (Bramlett & Radel, 2014. p. 12).

**Appendix B: Cost Analysis - Kinship Program and Foster Care  
(Excerpt from 2014 KinCare Summit Report)**

**Average Cost of (Formal) Kinship Foster Care**

Annual overall costs of foster care = **\$1,376,000,000** (OCFS foster care budget).

Number of children in all foster care placements = **24,541**.

Average cost of all foster care placements (institutional, special and exception needs, foster parents, etc, + administrative costs) = **\$56,060** per year.

Average cost of one child placed in regular foster care (basic foster parent payment + administrative cost) = **\$21,535** per year.

**Average Cost of Informal Kinship Care**

Annual cost of one child in an OCFS kinship program (\$140,000 per program, over 300 children served per year per program) = **\$466**.

Annual average cost of public assistance per child (OTDA payment + administrative costs) = **\$6,024**.

Total cost per child of informal kinship care = **\$6,490**.

**Average Difference in Cost**

Difference between average cost of children in all formal foster care placements (\$54,060) **and** the cost for children in informal kinship care (\$6,490 – including a public assistance grant) = **\$49,570**.

Difference for a child placed in regular foster care with a foster parent = **\$14,595**.



### Appendix C: OCFS Local Kinship Programs (FY 2015-16)

Program	Approved Funding	Population Served
Berkshire Farm Center and Services for Youth	\$102,980	Erie County
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester / Catholic Family Center	\$102,980	Monroe County
Child Care Coordinating Council of the North Country, Inc.	\$102,980	Clinton County
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Orange County	\$102,980	Orange County
Family and Children's Services of Ithaca	\$102,980	Tompkins County
Family Enrichment Network, Inc.	\$102,980	Broome County, Tioga County
Family Service Society of Yonkers	\$102,980	Westchester County
Gateway-Longview, Inc.	\$102,980	Erie County
Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, Inc.	\$102,980	Brooklyn
Leadership Training, Inc.	\$102,980	Nassau County, Suffolk County
New Alternatives for Children, Inc.	\$102,980	New York City
New York Council on Adoptable Children, Inc.	\$102,980	New York City
The Neighborhood Center, Inc.*	\$102,980	Oneida County

\* Also provides information and referral services to Chenango, Herkimer, Lewis, Madison, and Oswego counties

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