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Momentum Builds to Change Federal Foster Care Financing
*New Report Highlights Positive Outcomes for Children When Relative
Caregivers are Supported*

Washington, D.C. – Grandparents and other relatives play a critical role in ensuring the safety and well-being of a significant number of children in foster care. Momentum is building this week in Congress to ensure children in foster care have the safe, permanent families they deserve. A report released on Capitol Hill shows how federal support for relative caregivers, who are raising roughly one-quarter of all foster children in the country, would result in nearly 20,000 children leaving foster care for families.

This week, Representatives Danny K. Davis (D-IL) and Timothy V. Johnson (R-IL) stepped forward to champion families for these children by introducing the Kinship Caregiver Support Act (H.R. 2188). The bill would allow thousands of children to leave foster care quickly and safely by giving states the option to use federal funds for subsidized guardianship payments. It would also help relative caregivers access information about local services and supports, establish separate licensing standards for grandparents and other relatives, provide them with prompt notice when children are taken into foster care, and extend education and training vouchers to youth who exit foster care to subsidized guardianship or adoption after age 14.

“Terminating support to families once guardianship is established presents overwhelming hardships for these children and families that discourage them from leaving foster care,” said Congressman Davis. “The limited federal support for guardianship is a critical roadblock to permanency for thousands of children, resulting in their remaining in the foster care longer than necessary and possibly aging out of the system without a legal family of their own.”

“We are now in effect penalizing grandparents who have the heart and compassion to raise their own grandchildren but do not always have adequate means,” agreed Congressman Johnson, “We can achieve family unity and all the blessings that a stable and permanent home provide along with saving resources over the long-term. This is a common-sense, bipartisan proposal that deserves to become law.” It has been estimated that nearly 20,000 children in foster care for whom reunification with parents or adoption is not possible could leave the foster care system today if their caregivers could become legal guardians and receive financial support.

On Friday, Generations United and Kids Are Waiting, a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts, briefed House members on a report, “Time for Reform: Support Relatives in Providing Foster Care and Permanent Families for Children,” that demonstrates the foster care system’s reliance on relatives throughout the country and illustrates the need for subsidized guardianship for children for whom reunification with parents or adoption is not feasible. The briefing featured remarks by Congressman Danny K. Davis, Donna Butts, executive director of Generations United, and Lee Hammond, board member of AARP.

Former foster youth and the relatives who raised them from states across the nation, including Iowa, Illinois, and Washington, related their personal insights and experiences at the briefing. “Relative caregivers provide an important safety net for children across the nation whose parents are unavailable or unable to safely care for them,” observed Donna Butts, executive director of Generations United.

“Three years after I entered foster care, my aunt was granted one of the first subsidized guardianships in Illinois,” reported Robert Johnson, a former foster youth who spoke at the briefing. “She could never have provided for me and my sisters without financial support to help defray the costs of raising three children in addition to her son. But with that support, I was able to leave foster care.”

Sponsors of the briefing included Generations United, Kids Are Waiting, AARP, Center for Law and Social Policy, Child Welfare League of America, and the Children’s Defense Fund.

Reform of federal foster care financing to enable subsidized guardianships for relatives was also the topic at a Tuesday breakfast meeting of the Illinois Congressional delegation. The meeting featured Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Director Erwin McEwen; Nancy Salyers, former Presiding Judge of the Child Protection Division of Cook County Juvenile Court; and Mark Testa, Director of the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign discussing the positive impact that a decade of subsidized guardianship has had on children and families in Illinois.

Generations United (www.gu.org) is the only national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. GU represents more than 100 national, state, and local organizations and individuals representing more than 70 million Americans. Since 1986, GU has served as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation.

Kids Are Waiting: Fix Foster Care Now (www.kidsarewaiting.org) is a national, nonpartisan campaign dedicated to ensuring that all children in foster care have the safe, permanent families they deserve by reforming the federal financing structure that governs our nation’s foster care program. Led by The Pew Charitable Trusts, Kids Are Waiting is a collaboration of leading child welfare, family, judicial and other organizations promoting federal foster care financing reform.