

Year One Progress Report

Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act

Prepared by

Administration for Community Living
Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren



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INTRODUCTION

The number of grandparents and other older relatives who are caring for children is significant and growing, in part due to drug and alcohol misuse, incarceration, economic instability, military deployment, and mental illness. Although caregivers' lives are enhanced by the experience, providing full-time care to children can decrease caregivers' abilities to address their own health and well-being needs.

Recognizing that these caregivers would benefit from improved coordination of resources intended to support them, as well as better dissemination of information about those resources, the [Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act](#) (the Act), S1091, established the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (the council).

This report serves to highlight council activities since the Act was passed, including the process for selecting council members; the role and purpose of council subcommittees; the information shared during the three full council meetings held between August 28-29, 2019 and September 15, 2020; and an update on the status of the council's report to Congress.

For the purpose of this report and the ensuing work of the council, the broad term "Kinship Families and Grandfamilies" was adopted by the council at its April 2020 meeting. The broad term is used to define families in which children are being raised by grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends. Council members agreed to adopt the two harmonized terms, to be used as proper nouns, for use in its future deliberations including in the report to Congress.

The adoption of this broad definition by the council reflects a commitment to respecting the diversity and the cultural preferences of caregivers raising children today, while also recognizing that a significant challenge faced by both Kinship Families and Grandfamilies is the current lack of standard and consistent definitions and processes.

BACKGROUND

The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act

The Act, which became law on July 7, 2018, directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to establish an Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. The Secretary assigned responsibility for implementing the Advisory Council to the Administration for Community Living (ACL).

The council will develop a report that includes best practices, resources, and other useful information for grandparents and other older relatives raising children. This report will be delivered to the Secretary of HHS, Congress, and the state agencies responsible for carrying out family caregiver programs.

Selection of the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

ACL published a Federal Register notice on October 12, 2018, for nominations of non-federal members to serve on the council. ACL received 74 unique nominations for individuals expressing interest in serving on the council. ACL staff reviewed the nominations and settled on a field of 18 proposed nominees. In deciding which nominees to select, the following factors were considered:

1. **Kinship type:** The Act requires that a “grandparent raising a grandchild” and an “older relative caregiver of children” be included on the council. Based on the mix of nominations received, ACL selected individuals whose situations reflected these relationships.
2. **Other professionals:** ACL recommended that professionals with pertinent levels of expertise be included on the council to ensure that complex areas of the council’s tasks are adequately addressed. To accomplish this, eight nominees with experience in advocacy, direct service, academia, and research were nominated for consideration.
3. **Geographic and regional spread:** The experiences of kinship caregivers and the professionals who work in this field can vary based on the state/region, as well as available resources and programs to support them. To ensure a non-federal council membership that reflected a cross-section of the country, at least one nominee from each HHS region is included.
4. **Letters of support:** Most of the nominations included letters of support and references from employers, co-workers, elected officials, etc. ACL used this additional information when and where applicable to support its recommendation to nominate.

MEETINGS OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

First Council Meeting

On August 28th and 29th, 2019, the council convened for the first time in Washington, DC. The inaugural meeting included remarks from Lance Robertson, Administrator and Assistant Secretary for Aging at ACL, and Eric Hargan, Deputy Secretary of HHS, both of whom emphasized the importance of the council's work. Presentations on the first day included an "Overview of Grandfamilies, supportive policies, programs and resources;" "A look at Grandfamilies and their needs and dynamics, with an emphasis on African-American Grandfamilies;" and "An in-depth look at American Indian and Alaska Native Grandfamilies."

The convening of the council was a major first step in HHS' effort to provide information on resources for supporting grandparents and older relatives, including those available to help meet the health, educational, nutritional, and other needs of the children in their care, as well as maintain their own physical and mental health and emotional well-being. The council must also consider the unique needs of grandparents and other relatives raising children affected by the opioid crisis and must ensure the needs of Native Americans are addressed.

Subcommittees

On the second day of the inaugural meeting, council members broke into seven small working groups to discuss priority areas they thought should receive further examination and in-depth consideration in future committee meetings. The groups discussed the following topic areas:

- Services and support
- Health, nutrition, mental health
- Education
- Special needs of grandparents and older relative caregivers
- Impact of opioid crisis
- Grandparent or relative caregiver needs: cultural differences
- Public policy: legal and financial implications

After review by ACL and the council co-chairs, four subcommittees were established.

Subcommittee 1: Education and Outreach for Families and Professionals. This subcommittee focuses on educating professionals, families, and the public on the needs and strengths of Grandfamilies; outreach to connect Kinship Families and Grandfamilies with necessary services and support; and coordinating services across agencies. This committee will also address working with schools and related systems to meet the educational needs of the children.

Subcommittee 2: Health Focus: Mind, Body, and Soul. This subcommittee addresses the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of both the caregivers and the children.

Subcommittee 3: Unique Needs and Strengths of Grandfamilies. This subcommittee considers the unique needs, strengths, and circumstances of various special populations of Kinship Families and Grandfamilies. The subcommittee's specific focus is on grandparents and other relatives raising children as a result of the opioid crisis or other substance use, and grandparents and other relatives raising children within tribal communities.

Subcommittee 4: Legal and Financial Issues, Income Supports, and Housing. This subcommittee focuses on financial and legal issues facing Kinship Families and Grandfamilies as well as availability and access to income supports and housing.

Since the inaugural meeting, the subcommittees have met regularly to discuss and make action plans for their priorities. Through the subcommittees, council members have guided the development of information gathering tools and made action plans for their priority areas to facilitate the development of the report to Congress. Meetings of the full council and the subcommittees have been facilitated by ACL staff and the subcommittee co-chairs.

Second Council Meeting

On April 23, 2020, the council convened for the second time, this time virtually. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of Kinship and Grandfamily caregivers. Through facilitated discussion, council members also reviewed a glossary of terms pertinent to kinship care and agreed upon terms that would be used by the council in all future meetings and materials. Finally, in this meeting the council created and adopted a vision statement as well as five guiding principles.

In his opening remarks, Administrator Robertson conveyed the mission statement for the council, which will serve as a roadmap for its work moving forward:

“The mission of the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (SGRG) is to identify, promote, coordinate, and disseminate information, resources, and best practices to help grandparents and older relative caregivers of children meet the health, educational, nutritional, and other needs of the children in their care, while maintaining their own physical, mental, and emotional well-being. As part of this mission, all recommendations will consider the needs of members of Native American tribes and families affected by the opioid crisis.”

Advisory Council Responds to the Coronavirus Pandemic

Following the global pandemic outbreak in March 2020, council members began to explore ways to get timely information to Kinship Families and Grandfamilies to educate and help them stay safe. Council members submitted resources they had found personally useful or were aware of due to their professional experience. Upon receiving the recommended resources, ACL staff reviewed and compiled them into five major topic areas:

- COVID-19 Resources for Kinship Family and Grandfamily Caregivers
- General COVID-19 Information from the Federal Government
- Tips for “Staying Connected” in an Emergency
- Helplines and Hotlines
- Resources for Health Care and Social Service Providers

With the resources from council members and the above list as a table of content, the council developed a customized resource document: [COVID-19/Emergency Preparedness Resource Guide for Kinship Families and Grandfamilies](#).

Establishing Common Terms for Council Use and Report to Congress

After a discussion of the many related terms that can be used to define families in which children are being raised by grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends, council members agreed to adopt the two harmonized terms listed below for use in its future deliberations including the report to Congress:

TERMS	DEFINITION
Grandfamilies	Term used to describe a situation where children are being raised by their grandparents.
Kinship Families	Families in which children reside with, and are being raised by, other extended family members or adults with whom they have a close family-like relationship, such as godparents and close family friends.

With the adoption of a mission statement and common terms, council members discussed and agreed to adopt the following as its vision statement:

“The Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (SGRG) will be a leader for identifying and sharing resources to support, educate, empower, and advocate for Kinship Families and Grandfamilies. The Council will increase awareness and understanding of the needs of these families to ensure they are treated with respect and dignity. By honoring cultures, values, and diversities, we will create a better future so that families can flourish.”

Develop and Adopt Guiding Principles

The final portion of the meeting focused on an intensive revision and editing session, during which the council discussed and collectively drafted, edited, and adopted a set of principles that will guide its work and the recommendations it makes to Congress. The council’s guiding principles to support Kinship Families and Grandfamilies are as follows:

1. We recognize and define Kinship Families and Grandfamilies as families in which children reside with, and are being raised by, grandparents or other extended family members, or adults with whom they have a close family-like relationship.
2. Activities will promote greater adoption of person- and family-centered supports that place Kinship Families and Grandfamilies at the center of every support system, while also acknowledging the challenge of possible conflicting goals.
3. Efforts will aim to empower Kinship Families and Grandfamilies to advocate for themselves to meet the needs of the child and family members. With improved access to resources they may engage and contribute meaningfully in their communities.
4. Recommendations should recognize and support Kinship Families and Grandfamilies in a fair and impartial manner considering the physical, cultural, emotional, and financial impacts.
5. The National Family Caregiving Strategy will include and amplify the voices of Kinship Families and Grandfamilies.

Third Council Meeting

On September 15, 2020, the council convened virtually for its third meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to learn about the submitted responses to a Request for Information (RFI) that the council had posted earlier in the year. Finally, the council discussed high-level recommendations to be included in its report to Congress.

HHS Secretary Alex Azar opened the meeting with a video message in which he acknowledged the stability, permanency, and sense of belonging grandparents and other kinship caregivers provide for the children in their care. He said Kinship Families and Grandfamilies are “national assets we must all cherish and they deserve the best we have to offer in terms of support, recognition and understanding.” He commended council members for their hard work. He expressed his belief that each member brings a unique and critical perspective to this work that will fulfill Congress’ expectations for the Act, and more importantly, will improve the lives of Kinship Families and Grandfamilies.

The Council Chair, Administrator Robertson, provided opening remarks and thanked members for their commitment, expertise, guidance, and all the resources they bring to the work of the council. He also thanked members of the public who tuned in to participate in the discussions and expressed appreciation for their interest. He called the meeting to order and reminded members to check out a recent blog post by the meeting co-moderator, Lori Stalbaum, titled “[Led by Love: ACL Recognizes Grandfamilies on Grandparents Day 2020](#),” calling out the incredible sacrifices and role grandparents play.

[Request for Information \(RFI\) Analysis and Findings](#)

To ensure that there is a balanced and robust collaboration and input from all stakeholders, an RFI was issued via the ACL website on December 7, 2019, and closed on February 7, 2020. In response, ACL received 307 submissions that provided 1,908 total responses across the nine categories of information for which ACL was seeking input. A thorough review and analysis of all responses was conducted so the information can be included in the council’s report to Congress.

It should be noted that the deadline for submissions was before the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, data collected and analyzed does not reflect any information pertinent to this topic area. Furthermore, while demographic data was not specifically requested as part of the RFI, based on the analysis of responses, it was determined that almost half (47.56%) of respondents were grandparents and almost 1/3 (31.27%) of respondents were from community organizations or government agencies.

Wilma Brockington-Parker, analyst, gave a presentation of her analysis and findings of the 307 submissions received in response to ACL’s RFI. The presentation separated responses by purpose and outcomes based on the information requested in the RFI, an overview of the responses, primary issues, respondent concerns, and recommendations.

Among the findings is the fact that some respondents noted they did not know nor were they prepared for the financial pressures/consequences they experienced.

The data showed that some types of support or financial assistance were only available to the 60+ population, while it is well documented that many caregivers are in their 30s, 40s, or 50s. This, in addition to programs that may vary by the state where one resides, can present undue barriers for kinship and grandparent caregivers. A question about whether additional legislation is needed to better serve and support Kinship Families and Grandfamilies received 77.8% positive responses.

Primary issues identified by respondents, per Ms. Brockington-Parker’s analysis, included:

- Health, safety, and what is best for the children
- Lack of preparedness for financial pressures and consequences, such as housing, legal, medical, employment opportunities, and childcare
- Managing physical and mental health issues
- Lack of a “gatekeeper” between biological parents and the children
- Not having appropriate, affordable, and/or supportive advocacy
- Issues are multi-faceted, variable, and intertwined
- Lack of information, as shown by the frequent comment that respondents don’t know what they don’t know, such as how to find information about available resources or financial support mechanisms

Ms. Brockington-Parker also noted that respondents expressed concern in the following areas, shown in order of highest to lowest frequency of responses:

- Finances
- Legislation/Laws
- Legal Assistance
- Schools/Education
- Addictions
- Housing
- Food/Nutrition
- Respite
- Physical Health
- Mental/Emotional Health
- Medical Health

Finally, Ms. Brockington-Parker identified 337 recommended resources provided by respondents. These include 201 state/national programs, 78 publications, 39 research articles, 13 books, and 6 videos, all of which the council will review before disseminating.

Formulating Report Recommendations

The ACL-designated federal officials for the council moderated a discussion among the council members of recommendations that were proposed and reviewed in previous subcommittee meetings for the purpose of reaching consensus so that they can be incorporated into the draft report to Congress. Members engaged in a focused deliberation of each recommendation and suggested rephrasing of certain language where they deemed necessary. They introduced changes or modifications after discussing each recommendation, gave verbal approval to adopt the recommendation as is, or in some cases, suggested new recommendations after a careful step-by-step discussion of each recommendation.

The meeting closed with the moderators explaining what the council members could expect next, which included ACL first reviewing and revising the recommendations document based on feedback received during the meeting, followed by ACL polling the non-federal members to indicate their agreement with the revised/reworded document of recommendations developed during this meeting.

REPORT TO CONGRESS

The council has made progress in identifying information for its report to Congress. The report is informed by submissions to the RFI referenced earlier, including the resources provided in response to the RFI as well as from a review of existing literature; presentations by and discussions with experts in the field; and, of course, from the council members' experience and expertise.

Areas of focus in the report will serve to identify unmet needs of Kinship Families and Grandfamilies; as well as identify systemic gaps and highlight model approaches or best practices currently used in the field; provide useful resources; and recommendations for improving the lives of Kinship Families and Grandfamilies and the children that they love and care for every day.

CONCLUSION

Although the council members have been thoughtfully, diligently, and thoroughly fulfilling the requirements of the SGRG Act, this work has just begun. The investment and commitment of policymakers and advocacy groups, as well as the continuous input/participation from the public, are critical to the success of this legislation. The public can follow the council's continued progress at [ACL.gov/SGRG](https://acl.gov/SGRG), which is regularly updated to include full council meeting dates and materials.