
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 662 Session of
2015

INTRODUCED BY PASHINSKI, HENNESSEY, BISHOP, SAMUELSON, KOTIK,
JAMES, CALTAGIRONE, COHEN, MURT, D. COSTA, BROWNLEE,
READSHAW, THOMAS, V. BROWN, BIZZARRO, MATZIE, SNYDER,
RAVENSTAHL, McCARTER, KIM, SCHWEYER AND ENGLISH,
FEBRUARY 27, 2015

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, FEBRUARY 27, 2015

AN ACT

1 Establishing the Kinship Caregiver Navigator Pilot Program
2 within the Department of Human Services.

3 The General Assembly hereby finds and declares as follows:

4 (1) Nearly 240,000 Pennsylvania children under the age
5 of 18 live in households headed by relatives other than the
6 child's parents and of those over 191,000 are being raised by
7 the child's grandparents.

8 (2) Nearly 80,000 Pennsylvania grandparents are
9 responsible for caring for grandchildren living with them and
10 nearly 20% of these households are living in poverty.

11 (3) The number of grandparent and other relative
12 caregivers increases every year.

13 (4) Grandparents and other relative caregivers face many
14 challenges, including:

15 (i) Personal costs associated with raising a child.

16 (ii) Legal costs associated with custody hearings.

- 1 (iii) Lack of a support network.
2 (iv) Lack of respite for the caregiver.
3 (v) Lack of knowledge of local services and supports
4 for children in the care of a grandparent or other
5 relative.

6 (5) Article XIII of the act of June 13, 1967 (P.L.31,
7 No.21), known as the Public Welfare Code, requires county
8 agencies to give relatives first consideration when placing a
9 child, recognizing the importance of keeping children
10 situated in families.

11 (6) A Kinship Caregiver Navigator Program would provide
12 kinship caregivers with information on services and legal
13 resources available to them, and form a referral network to
14 assist them in accessing these services.

15 (7) By connecting kinship caregivers with information,
16 services and support, a Kinship Caregiver Navigator Program
17 would also benefit children being raised by family members by
18 helping kinship caregivers be better parents.

19 (8) Several states have Kinship Caregiver Navigator
20 Programs including Ohio, New Jersey and New York.

21 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
22 hereby enacts as follows:

23 Section 1. Short title.

24 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Kinship
25 Caregiver Navigator Pilot Program Act.

26 Section 2. Definitions.

27 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall
28 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
29 context clearly indicates otherwise:

30 "Area agency on aging." The single local agency designated

1 by the Department of Aging within each planning and service area
2 to administer the delivery of a comprehensive and coordinated
3 plan of social and other services and activities.

4 "Child." An individual under 18 years of age.

5 "County agency." The county children and youth social
6 service agency established under section 405 of the act of June
7 24, 1937 (P.L.2017, No.396), known as the County Institution
8 District Law and supervised by the department under Article IX
9 of the act of June 13, 1967 (P.L.31, No.21), known as the Public
10 Welfare Code.

11 "Department." The Department of Human Services of the
12 Commonwealth.

13 "Kinship Caregiver." An individual who is at least 21 years
14 of age who lives with and is responsible for the care of a child
15 who is related within the third degree of consanguinity or
16 affinity to the parent or stepparent of a child.

17 "Kinship Navigator." An individual who is at least 21 years
18 of age who:

19 (1) has been trained by the department to, at a minimum:

20 (i) understand the various State agency systems
21 serving kinship caregivers;

22 (ii) assist in accessing federal, State and local
23 service and supports available to kinship caregivers; and

24 (iii) track trends, concerns and other factors
25 related to kinship caregivers; and

26 (2) has submitted to a criminal background check.

27 "Program." The Kinship Caregiver Navigator Pilot Program.

28 "Website." The Kinship Caregiver Navigator Internet website
29 created and maintained by the department.

30 Section 3. Kinship Caregiver Navigator Pilot Program.

1 (a) Establishment.--The department shall institute a 12
2 month Kinship Caregiver Navigator Pilot Program.

3 (b) Locations.--The department shall determine the number of
4 local pilot programs to establish across this Commonwealth, with
5 at least one of the pilot programs located in Northeast
6 Pennsylvania.

7 (c) Cooperation.--The department may work with other states
8 that have similar programs for assistance in establishing a
9 pilot program in this Commonwealth.

10 (d) Input.--The department may seek and receive input for
11 the program from members of the family court judiciary, family
12 law practitioners and family-child therapists and counselors.

13 (e) Minimum criteria.--The program shall determine the level
14 of services and supports kinship caregivers in this Commonwealth
15 need to assist them in raising a child. The department shall, at
16 a minimum:

17 (1) Create and maintain a Kinship Caregiver Navigator
18 website that provides information on support and services
19 available to kinship caregivers and those who are planning on
20 becoming kinship caregivers, with special emphasis on kinship
21 caregivers who are grandparents in accordance with the
22 following:

23 (i) The information shall include:

24 (A) Federal and State programs.

25 (B) Support groups for kinship caregivers and
26 children in the kinship caregiver's care.

27 (C) Respite services for kinship caregivers.

28 (D) Financial aid.

29 (E) Relevant legal resources and available
30 assistance.

1 (F) Education and supportive therapy services
2 for children.

3 (ii) The website must include a toll-free telephone
4 number kinship caregivers can call to reach a kinship
5 navigator. The website may offer web-based on-line chat
6 for kinship caregivers to connect with the kinship
7 navigator.

8 (iii) The website must offer a way for the public to
9 provide input or suggestions.

10 (2) Work with the area agency on aging and the county
11 agency to track trends, concerns and other factors related to
12 kinship caregivers and to identify areas of the Commonwealth
13 lacking in services and resources for kinship caregivers.

14 (3) Create and maintain a kinship caregiver hotline to
15 provide supportive listening and guidance to kinship
16 caregivers or those who are planning on becoming kinship
17 caregivers. The department may also create and maintain a
18 live Internet-based chat to provide guidance to kinship
19 caregivers and those planning on becoming kinship caregivers.

20 (4) Designate and train individuals within the
21 department to serve as Kinship Caregiver Navigators.

22 (5) Educate the public on services and supports
23 available to kinship caregivers with an emphasis on services
24 to assist kinship caregivers who are grandparents. The
25 department may utilize websites or coordinate with other
26 State and county agencies, area agencies on aging, schools,
27 senior centers, community organizations and legislative
28 offices in this Commonwealth, to assist in disseminating
29 information.

30 (6) Communicate with area agencies on aging, county

1 agencies, the Senate Aging and Youth Committee and the Aging
2 and Older Adult Services Committee and the Children and Youth
3 Committee of the House of Representatives and for input on
4 best practices in the design and function of program.

5 (7) Investigate the feasibility of an affirmative
6 program which may include public-private partnerships similar
7 to existing programs in other states that have kinship
8 navigators.

9 Section 4. Kinship Caregiver Navigators.

10 A Kinship Caregiver Navigator shall, at a minimum, do the
11 following:

12 (1) Assist kinship caregivers, through live Internet-
13 based chat on the website or by phone to:

14 (i) Navigate the website to access relevant federal
15 and State benefits, local community supports and
16 services.

17 (ii) Answer questions regarding kinship care giving.

18 (2) Mediate with State agency staff or service providers
19 and, when necessary, assist in establishing relationships
20 between kinship caregivers and relevant federal and State
21 agency staff.

22 (3) Work with a local area agency on aging and county
23 agency to identify and provide outreach to kinship caregivers
24 in need of additional services with special attention to
25 grandparents, relatives not proficient in English or those in
26 geographically isolated areas.

27 (4) Create a community-based support network for kinship
28 caregivers by developing collaborative working relationships
29 with groups and agencies, including:

30 (i) Community organizations.

- 1 (ii) Faith-based organizations.
- 2 (iii) Social agencies.
- 3 (iv) Local community service providers.

4 Section 5. Report.

5 The department shall report the results of the program to the
6 General Assembly within three months of the end of the pilot
7 program. The report shall include the following:

8 (1) An assessment of the overall effectiveness of the
9 program.

10 (2) Recommendations about how to best serve kinship
11 caregivers, with an emphasis on kinship caregivers who are
12 grandparents.

13 (3) A comparison of the cost of placing a child in
14 foster care with the cost of operating a Kinship Caregiver
15 Navigator Program.

16 (4) Recommendations to establish a permanent Kinship
17 Caregiver Navigator Program.

18 Section 6. Effective date.

19 This act shall take effect in 90 days.