



*Answers you can trust*

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# Challenges and Solutions for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Relatives as Parents

A report by the Area Agency on Aging 1-B  
Grandparents Raising Grandchildren  
Advisory Council Study Committee

A call for:

- Aging Network Action
  - Education
  - Technical Assistance
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## Introduction

The Area Agency on Aging 1-B (AAA 1-B) was established in 1974 under a federal mandate of the Older Americans Act and the state Older Michigianians Act to serve the needs of approximately 760,000 older adults who reside in the southeast Michigan counties of Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, and Washtenaw. The AAA 1-B is dedicated to: 1) educating and advocating on issues of concern to older persons; 2) allocating federal and state funding for social and nutritional services; 3) developing new older adult services; 4) coordinating activities with other public and private organizations; and 5) assessing the needs of vulnerable older persons and providing access to community-based and long term care services. The AAA 1-B Advisory Council helps achieve the agency mission by identifying needs and concerns of Region 1-B residents, and planning and developing appropriate actions that assure older persons have access to high quality, efficient and effective services. Each summer, the AAA 1-B establishes an ad hoc study committee to explore selected issues of concern to older adults.

A growing number of grandparents are faced with the responsibility of parenting their grandchildren at a time in their lives when they expected to be planning and enjoying their retirement. Beyond the obvious drain on their leisure time and retirement income, these grandparents must deal with social, emotional, and practical problems inherent in raising grandchildren at their stage of life. These challenges are often compounded by the fact that many of the children have emotional and/or behavioral challenges often related to the trauma experienced when they are unable to remain in their homes with their birthparents—whether because of child abuse or neglect, the death of a parent, parental incarceration, substance abuse, or other reasons. Coping and parenting skills that they developed through years of raising their own children may not be appropriate or effective for raising children in society today.

Grandparents raising grandchildren were a strong presence at the 2019 Listening Sessions conducted by the Area Agency on Aging 1-B (AAA 1-B) in preparation for development of the region's FY 2020 – 2022 Area Plan. They shared the struggles they face managing their child rearing responsibilities while coping with new financial constraints, legal obstacles and social barriers. Consistent themes of their comments were that they felt alone in their struggle, were often unaware of the resources available to them, and that the legal and social services systems often did not offer decipherable or desirable support options.

To address these issues the AAA 1-B formed an Ad Hoc Study Committee on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren to:

- Identify pain points for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- Identify barriers to successful child rearing.
- Assess the adequacy of community resources in the aging and child welfare systems.
- Identify and recommend policy and programmatic solutions to improve support options for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- Produce a written report that includes findings and recommended actions for approval by the AAA 1-B Board of Directors.

This report represents the results of the Committee's research and recommended actions that can be taken by the AAA 1-B, service organizations and policy makers to address identified concerns. While the phrase 'grandparents raising grandchildren' is used in the report and implies the findings are only applicable adults who are age 55 and older caring for their grandchildren, as used in this report this group includes other older relatives who are acting as parents of children who are relatives.

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*Two grandparents in Monroe County could not enroll their 2nd grade grandson in school. The child's mother could not be located until 5 (five) weeks into the school year! The child missed over half a marking period of his 2nd grade. The grandparents repeatedly tried to enroll the grandson but could not enroll because they did not have custody or guardianship.*

*- The experience of a grandparent raising grandchildren*

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## Findings of Unmet Needs and Solutions

### Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in Region 1-B

The American Community Survey, conducted by the US Census Bureau, provides limited information on the prevalence and demographics of grandparents raising grandchildren population in Region 1-B. The 2017 5-year American Community Survey estimates that there are 14,850 grandparents responsible for grandchildren in Region 1-B. 54.2% of grandparents raising grandchildren are under the age of 60, and 31% of grandparents raising grandchildren live in households where the parent of the grandchild is not present. Grandparents raising grandchildren make up 1.05% of the total 60+ population in Region 1-B, up from .85% in 2010. Monroe and Livingston counties have the highest proportions of older adults raising grandchildren. 70% of all grandparents raising grandchildren in Region 1-B live in Oakland and Macomb counties.

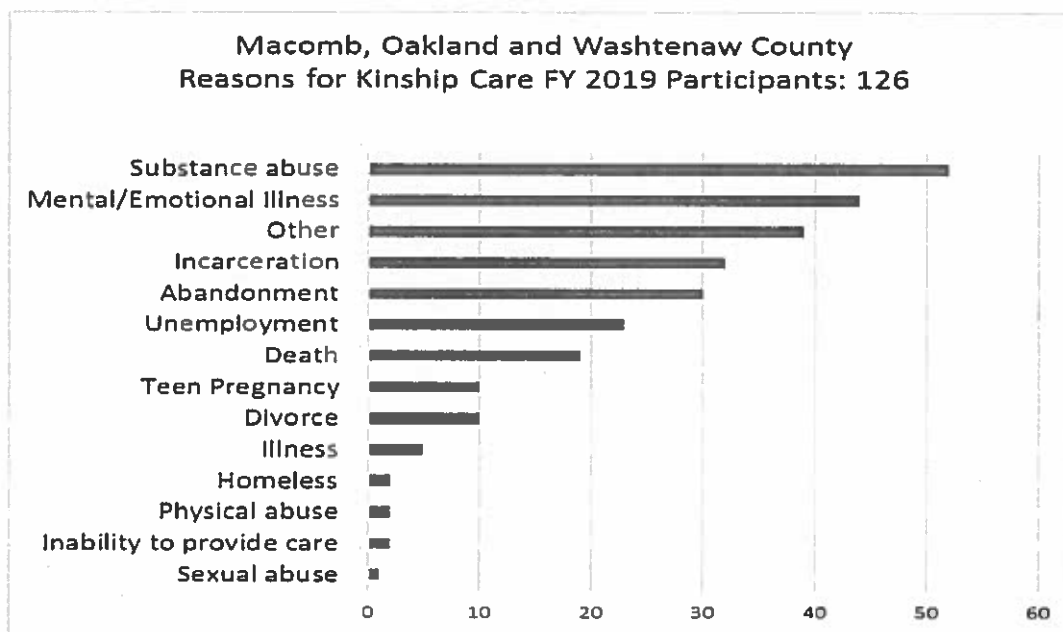
### Grandparents Raising Grandchildren by Age of Grandparent

County	Total GRG Population	GRG Age 30-59	GRG Age 60 +	Total 60+ Population	% 60+ Population that are GRG
Livingston	910	421	489	41,663	1.17%
Macomb	4,587	2,737	1,850	192,997	0.96%
Monroe	1,111	632	479	35,206	1.36%
Oakland	5,727	2,744	2,983	273,867	1.09%
St. Clair	1,147	735	412	38,914	1.06%
Washtenaw	1,368	779	589	65,781	0.90%
<b>Region 1-B Total</b>	<b>14,850</b>	<b>8,048</b>	<b>6,802</b>	<b>648,428</b>	<b>1.05%</b>

Younger grandparents raising grandchildren (aged 35-59) are more likely to be in the labor force (75%) than grandparents aged 60+ (35%). A higher proportion of younger grandparents (13%) live in poverty compared with older grandparents (10%). Older grandparents have higher rates of disability, with 35% of older grandparents reporting that they are disabled, while 17% of younger grandparents are disabled. Additional demographic data about grandparents raising grandchildren by county can be found in Appendix B.

### Reasons for Caregiving and Referral Sources

Data in the charts below was provided by the Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw County Relatives as Parents and OLHSA (Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency) programs on the types of problems that caused the need for kinship care, and the referral sources to the program.

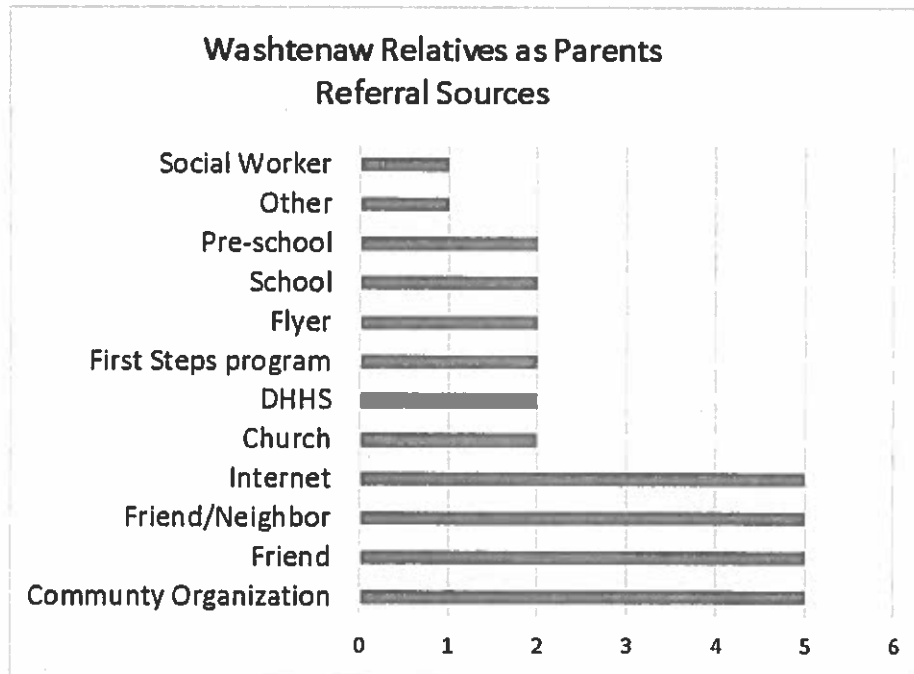



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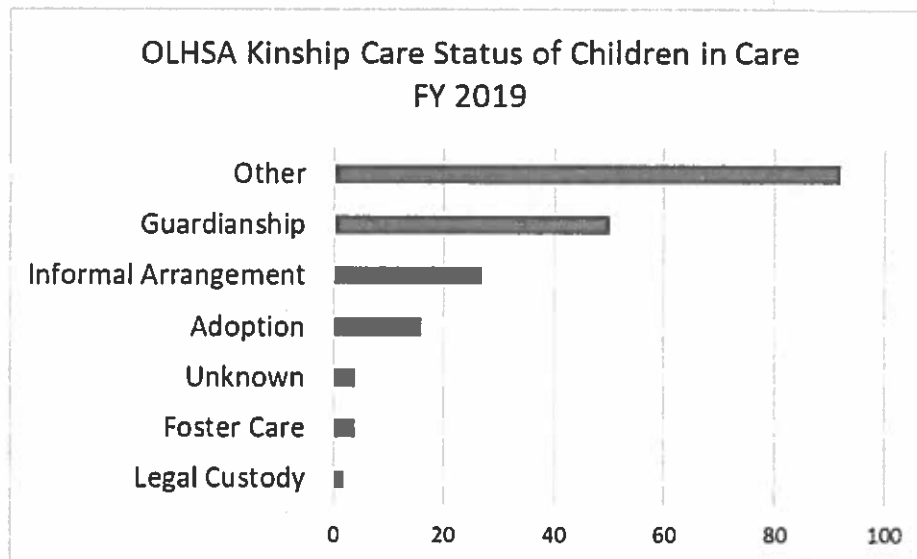
*Children’s Protective Services in most cases adds additional unwanted and unnecessary stumbling blocks for grandparents. CPS has their own agenda and causes more problems than necessary when dealing with kinship care cases.*

*- The experience of a grandparent raising grandchildren*

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OLHSA also reported the status of the care relationship of grandparents raising grandchildren and the children they are raising, which is reflected in the chart below.



**Unmet Needs and Solutions**

The impetus for this study was the feedback provided by an unprecedented number of grandparents raising grandchildren at the 2019 Community Listening Sessions held by the AAA 1-B in preparation for the development of its FY 2020 – 22 Area Plan. Testimony by attendees described the struggles they face in fulfilling the obligations they have made to care for their grandchildren and requested help to better assist them in meeting the challenges they face. The Study Committee engaged several stakeholders who work with the grandparents raising grandchildren/relatives as parents population in a process of identifying service and policy gaps, solutions and recommended actions to address identified concerns. The following matrix summarizes the Committee findings.

Service/Policy Gaps	Solutions/Recommendations	Actions
There are many grandparents and other relatives under age 55 who wish to participate in GRG (grandparents raising grandchildren) programs, but low-income individuals are excluded and often unable to participate in activities with a cost.	Identify alternative resources or policy solutions that support the inclusion of age-ineligible individuals.	Collect data on prevalence of age-ineligible GRGs from AAA 1-B contractors.  Advocate with Wilson Fund about supporting younger GRG inclusion demonstration.
The 'Grandparents Raising Grandchildren' label excludes other kinship caregivers.	Identify more inclusive program name by surveying GRG program participants on their preference.	Survey results found that program participants prefer the GRG program name.
The guardianship renewal process is inconsistent, varies by county, and is confusing causing anxiety.	Discuss with court officials concerns about court processes, rules, and expectations. Identify best practices.	Identify best practices and advocate with probate courts to adopt practices that address GRG concerns.
GRGs often struggle with parenting children in today's social environment, which is different from their first parenting experience.	Parenting training is needed that is customized to the unique circumstances of GRGs.	Identify entity to develop and provide customized parenting curriculum classes for GRGs.  Identify resources to support.
GRGs often unable to meet school technology requirements for communications such as email.	Advocate for more responsive education policies that provide accommodations and training on digital communications.	Raise awareness with school systems about this unmet need and advocate for appropriate accommodations.



<p>GRG program advocates state that there is no easily accessible data on GRGs to support grant proposals and program planning.</p>	<p>Query and publish GRG data available from Census.</p> <p>Conduct GRG need assessment survey.</p> <p>Encourage Probate Courts to add data collection point of relationship of child to guardian.</p>	<p>Produce Census GRG data report to county level.</p> <p>Identify leadership and a funding source to support a GRG need assessment survey.</p>
<p>Traveling with many grandchildren on public transportation can be costly and create expense burden.</p>	<p>Transit providers can adopt discount fare policies for low-income individuals and for children.</p>	<p>Create a model GRG-friendly transit fare discount program and advocate for its adoption.</p>
<p>GRGs need respite from caregiving, and emergency respite.</p>	<p>Identify providers and resources to support GRG regular and emergency respite.</p>	<p>Investigate provider resources.</p> <p>Investigate potential funding sources.</p>
<p>Becoming a GRG often creates unsustainable financial burdens and eligibility restrictions of foster care can make that support unavailable.</p>	<p>There is a new little-known state Family Independence Program that provides a \$78 monthly benefit available for certain low-income GRGs.</p>	<p>Increase public awareness of the Family Independence Program Child Only Grant benefit to support eligible GRGs.</p>
<p>The Aging and Adult Services Agency (AASA) service standard for Kinship Support Services states age eligibility is 60 and older, causing confusion because the Older Americans Act states age eligibility is 55 and older.</p>	<p>The published AASA Kinship Support Services standard needs to be updated to be consistent with the Older Americans Act.</p>	<p>Advocate that the AASA Kinship Support Services standard be updated and corrected on the AASA web site.</p>
<p>Some state court and children's services program policies are the source of restricted options and impede problem solving for GRGs.</p>	<p>Many state policy issues that frustrate and restrict GRG options are being addressed in a bi-partisan package of legislation being developed by members of the House of Representatives.</p>	<p>Collaborate with legislators in the development of proposed legislation and advocate for its passage.</p>

<p>Many GRGs report child rearing is an overwhelming experience and identify a need for respite to help prevent burnout and in emergencies when the GRG cannot be present and has no other caregivers as their backup.</p>	<p>Older Americans Act funding under the National Family Caregiver Support Program can be used to provide GRG respite.</p>	<p>Investigate the possibility of supporting a GRG respite model in Region 1-B with AAA 1-B or alternate funds.</p>
<p>The Michigan State University Kinship Care Resource Center (KCRC) is a valuable statewide resource center for training, information, program development and advocacy. It is developing a Kinship Navigator program that will require a state fund match to draw down federal dollars beginning in FY2020-2021.</p>	<p>Promote the value proposition of the KCRC and its Kinship Navigator program.</p>	<p>Advocate for state matching fund support required to sustain the federal grant utilized to support the KCRC Kinship Navigator program.</p> <p>Advocate to secure support for Kinship Navigator program legislation and funding as part of the Older Michigianians Day platform.</p>
<p>GRG support programs and resources are not available in all counties of Region 1-B.</p>	<p>The KCRC training and Kinship Navigator services can be made available to GRGs in areas of Region 1-B where no AAA 1-B services exist, and enhance the service delivered by existing programs.</p>	<p>Collaborate with the KCRC to address unmet training and resource navigation assistance needs in Region 1-B.</p>

## Conclusions

The Committee review found that unmet needs which are unique to the grandparents raising grandchildren population have not changed much since the AAA 1-B published its 1998 study Grandparents as Parents: A Survey of Incidence and Need. These five areas of need continue to be:

### *Social and Emotional Supports*

Support groups, counseling and socialization events continue to be essential to the emotional health of grandparents and services should be made more available or enhanced to meet this need.

### *Financial Resources*

Many grandparents, particularly those with a low fixed income, face overwhelming financial burdens as they take on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren. Financial assistance for expenses such as clothing, food, school, and health insurance are priorities.

### *Education and Informational Resources*

This includes enhancing public awareness, as well as specific education and information sessions targeted to grandparents raising grandchildren, service providers and policy makers.

### *Coping/Parenting Skills Training*

There appears to be a gap for training which includes coping skills for grandparents on dealing with drug abuse issues of grandchildren and/or their parents, difficult behaviors of the grandchildren, and how to appropriately raise children in today's social environment, which has different norms and expectations than when they raised their children.

### *Respite*

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren report that high levels of stress and burnout are associated with child rearing. Respite for the grandparents is needed as an essential component of healthy and successful child rearing.

A new sixth area of need appears to be *systems change*. Many of the frustrations expressed by grandparents raising grandchildren at community forums were directed toward public benefit program and probate court policies and procedures that do not offer assured rights and benefits without risks to continued child custody. Many individuals are forced to choose between adoption, foster care or

guardianship for the children in their care. Each option has significant risks and disadvantages that vary depending on the household situation. Systems change is needed that creates a more grandparent raising grandchildren-friendly environment.

## Recommendations

### 1. Resource Guide for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Collaborate with the Michigan State University Kinship Care Resource Center to produce and disseminate a set of print and digital county-specific resource guides for grandparents raising grandchildren that provides information on 1) understanding available benefits and resources, 2) information on legal issues and options, and 3) how to connect with available resources in each county.

#### Rationale

In 2001 the AAA 1-B printed and disseminated copies of a Grandparents' Guide to Raising Grandchildren for each Region 1-B county. Committee members, AAA 1-B providers of Kinship Care services and guest presenters agreed that an updated version of the guide would be a valuable resource for older adults. The Kinship Care Resource Center is in the process of developing a comparable resource guide that will contain information on benefits and legal issues, but with no local resources. The Center has indicated they can work with the AAA 1-B to help develop guides that combine their educational content with local community resource information.

### 2. Family Independence Program Child Only Grant FAQ

Create a brief informational flyer on the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Child Only Grant and other financial resources that offer a payment benefit to eligible grandparents raising grandchildren.

#### Rationale

There is limited information and considerable confusion and about the new Family Independence Program that potentially offers a monthly cash benefit starting at \$158 (higher depending on eligibility status and number of children) to grandparents raising grandchildren and other relatives acting as parents. Clarification on the extent of the benefit, eligibility criteria and application information, and potential consequences of program participation is needed to assist potential participants to decide whether to apply for the benefit. A brief document is needed that includes a description of the program and a Frequently Asked Question section and is targeted to low-income grandparents raising grandchildren.

### 3. Grandparent Raising Grandchildren Friendly Probate Courts

Identify and distribute recommendations for probate court actions that can make them more user friendly for grandparents raising grandchildren.

#### Rationale

Grandparents raising grandchildren and their advocates identify many examples of interactions with probate courts that cause confusion, frustration and fear. Areas of concern include communications,

fees, age discrimination, reporting requirements and expectations. The Committee believes a constructive compilation of concerns and suggestions could prompt changes that will make probate court interactions more sensitive to the unique needs of grandparents raising grandchildren and more user friendly. The heading for such a compilation should state something comparable to Ten Things Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Think Probate Courts Should Know.

4. Update State Kinship Care Services Definition

Advocate that the Michigan Aging and Adult Services Agency change the age of eligibility on their published service definition to be consistent with the Older Americans Act eligibility age of 55 and older.

Rationale

The age of eligibility for Older Americans Act National Family Caregiver Support Program services to grandparents raising grandchildren was lowered from 60 and older to age 55 and older in the 2016 reauthorization. However, the Michigan Aging and Adult Services Agency Kinship Services service definition published on the state web site still states eligibility is for those who are age 60 and older. This inconsistency has caused confusion and should be corrected.

5. Parenting Training Targeted to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Collaborate with the Kinship Care Resource Center to sponsor training and educational programs in Region 1-B including the provision of parenting training that is targeted to grandparents raising grandchildren

Rationale

Grandparents raising grandchildren have needs and challenges that are unique from other older adults. Educational information and training to address their needs is uncommon. One identified gap is for parenting skills training that accounts for the differences in parenting norms when grandparents raised their children and raising children in the current social environment. The Kinship Care Resource Center has developed trainings for caregivers on legal and other applicable issues, and should be engaged to provide parenting training in Region 1-B.

6. Grandparent Raising Grandchildren Respite

Secure support for a demonstration program that provides respite from child raising responsibilities for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Rationale

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren report that high levels of stress and burnout are associated with child rearing. Respite for the grandparents is needed as an essential component of healthy and

successful child rearing. This is an allowable use of National Family Caregiver Support Program funds however no such program exists in Region 1-B. The AAA 1-B should investigate the need for respite and potential community resources, and program models to assess the feasibility of demonstrating the viability of grandparent raising grandchildren respite.

**7. Emergency Respite**

Investigate the feasibility of establishing an emergency respite/child care resource for grandparents raising grandchildren.

**Rationale**

The Committee learned of a few examples of emergencies where grandparents were unable to provide for the care of their grandchildren for short periods and were unable to arrange for alternative child care. These emergencies usually involved health care crisis including hospitalizations. The AAA 1-B should determine the frequency of such emergencies and whether the problem is significant enough to develop a strategy to address the need.

**8. Advocate for Legislative Changes to Support Kinship Caregivers**

Identify and advocate for legislation that aims to create systemic change that is supportive of the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren.

**Rationale**

The proposals listed below would increase the amount of available support for grandparents raising grandchildren.

*Kinship Caregiver Navigator Legislation*

This act would establish the framework for state maintenance of the Kinship Care Navigation Center after federal grant funding is reduced in FY 2021. The navigator program would provide information and referral services to grandparents raising grandchildren throughout the state.

*Kinship Caregiver Legal Aid Legislation*

This bill would establish a kinship caregiver legal aid program in Michigan. The program would enable grandparents raising grandchildren of any age to receive legal advice from licensed attorneys for issues including navigating the civil court system, assistance with applying for services, and understanding the continuum of custodial relationships. This proposal would close a gap in current legal aid programs that makes it difficult for kinship caregivers under age 60 to receive free legal assistance.

*Kinship Caregiver Advisory Council Legislation*

This act would instruct the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to create a kinship caregiver advisory council. The council would be charged with studying the prevalence and needs of

kinship caregiver, advocating for system changes that support kinship caregivers, and preventing child abuse and neglect by supporting kinship caregivers in the formal child welfare system. The council would include membership from the Children Services Agency, the Aging and Adult Services Agency, the state court administrator, kinship caregivers, child welfare service agencies, and mental health professionals. This council would provide an opportunity for ongoing monitoring of the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren and identify future opportunities for advocates to support systems change to benefit kinship caregivers.

*De Facto Custody for Kinship Caregivers*

De Facto Custody, often referred to as De Facto Guardianship or De Facto Parent Status, addresses the need for a legal mechanism used by many states to grant legal status to caregivers who have assumed the role of a parent without first establishing legal standing. De Facto laws allow these caregivers to petition the court for legal status over the minor child; these laws often require that the child's biological parents be absent for a set period before a caregiver can petition the court for de facto status. Michigan is one of six states that does not have any established policy for recognizing de facto parents.<sup>1</sup> Establishing a De Facto Custody mechanism in Michigan would enable grandparents raising grandchildren to secure their legal status over a minor if they have been consistently providing care, enabling them to access programs and services that may not otherwise be available to them. However, creating such an option may require an overhaul of Michigan law for Circuit and Probate Courts as well as the legal presumptions which the courts must apply in each case. Further discussion is needed to develop a legislative proposal that provides adequate options and protections.

*Federal Older Americans Act Reauthorization- Remove the Title III E Funding Cap on Kinship Caregivers*

Title III E of the Federal Older Americans Act established the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP). This program provides funding to support older caregivers and family members caring for older adults, but funding for grandparents raising grandchildren is currently capped at 10% of total program funds. To better address the caregiving needs of grandparents raising children, AAAs should be allowed to exceed the 10 percent cap on Title III E National Family Caregiver Support

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lghtmap.org/img/maps/citations-parents-de-facto.pdf>

Program funding available to serve this population based on local needs. HR 4334, The Dignity in Aging Act includes the removal of this funding cap.

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*I have said "get involved" more times than I could keep track. Raising grandchildren or other related children involved so much more than standing before the judge.*

*- Advice from a grandparent raising grandchildren*

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Appendix A

Demographics

Characteristics of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Grandparent aged 60+														
	Race & Ethnicity							Gender		Marital Status		In Labor Force	With any disability	In Poverty
	White	Black	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Asian	Other	Two or more Races	Hispanic or Latino	Male	Female	Married	Unmarried			
Livingston	98.2	0	0	1.8	0	0	0	52.4	47.6	82.8	17.2	38.4	28.4	0.8
Macomb	69.9	23.9	2.1	2.7	1.4	0	2.3	37.5	62.5	60.5	39.5	26.5	30.5	22.1
Monroe	97.9	0	0	0	1	1	5.2	52.2	47.8	84.6	15.4	30.7	40.9	4.2
Oakland	54.4	36.9	1.2	2.6	1.2	3.7	1.1	45.6	54.4	68.2	31.8	38.4	35.6	8.3
St. Clair	91	3.4	1.2	0	1.5	2.9	1.5	40.8	59.2	76.2	23.8	44.9	31.3	9.5
Washtenaw	48.4	44	0	7.6	0	0	0	34.3	65.7	65.2	34.8	29.2	38.7	14.8

\*\*All numbers are percentages Source: American Community Survey 2017 5-Year

Characteristics of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Grandparent aged 30-59														
	Race & Ethnicity							Gender		Marital Status		In Labor Force	With any disability	In Poverty
	White	Black	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Asian	Other	Two or more Races	Hispanic or Latino	Male	Female	Married	Unmarried			
Livingston	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	47.3	52.7	97.6	2.4	84.1	13.1	0
Macomb	75.8	17.9	1.6	1.4	1	2.3	0.9	39	61	75.7	24.3	71.4	18	17.5
Monroe	91.3	8.7	0	0	0	0	0.8	38.6	61.4	63.9	36.1	71.4	18.8	16
Oakland	62.8	32	0.6	0.9	0.3	3.5	4.5	30.1	69.9	68.3	31.7	73.1	22.2	17.5
St. Clair	99.9	0	0	0	0	0.1	0	41.5	58.5	75.6	24.4	74	15.2	21.9
Washtenaw	73.6	22.1	4.4	0	0	0	5.4	29.7	70.3	60.8	39.2	78.3	16.8	8

\*\*All numbers are percentages Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-year