

MEMORANDUM

TO: BRUCE REED, ELENA KAGEN

FROM: TOM FREEDMAN, TANYA MARTIN

RE: GRANDPARENT CAREGIVERS

DATE: JULY 18, 1997

SUMMARY

Approximately 1.5 million children in the U.S. live with their grandparents without their own parents being present in the home. According to the AARP, the dominant reason grandparents are raising their grandchildren is substance abuse (drug/alcohol) by the parents. A recent study indicates that grandparents raising grandchildren are twice as likely to end up living in poverty. They are also likely to be seriously affected by the implementation of work requirements and time limits that are part of welfare reform. Some states, including California and Illinois, have considered exemptions from these requirements for custodial grandparents and other caregiver relatives. To date, AARP reports that no states have made significant changes in their TANF legislation in order to accommodate the particular circumstances of grandparent caregivers. The impact of welfare reform on grandparent caregivers will be a focus of the first national conference on kinship care sponsored by the Child Welfare League of America in San Francisco, CA on August 13-15.

STATISTICS

- According to the US Census, over 3.7 million children in the U.S. live with their grandparents; of that number 1.5 million do so without their parents being present in the household.
- One in 10 grandparents reported providing primary care for their grandchildren for at least six months (Gerontologist).
- 56% of grandparent caregiver households have incomes below \$20,000
- 27% of grandparent caregivers households live at or below poverty level
- According to an AARP Grandparent Information Center survey of grandparent caregivers;
 - 29% care for grandchildren are 4 or younger
 - 46% care for grandchildren are in elementary school
- The most common reasons grandparents care for grandchildren (AARP):
 - Substance abuse - 44%
 - Child abuse, neglect abandonment - 28%
 - Others: Teen pregnancy, incarceration, HIV/AIDS, death, unemployment, illness

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Bureau of Census estimated in 1994 that approximately 3.7 million children under 18 years of age were living in a household headed by their grandparent(s), a 40 percent increase over the prior decade. For more than a third of these children, neither parent is present in the home. Historically, grandparents stepped in to parent their children in cases of death, mental illness, or unemployment, but today's grandparents are more likely to be taking on the parenting role due to dysfunctional parents who are unable (drugs, incarceration, HIV/AIDS) or unwilling (abuse, abandonment) to care for their own children.

Kinship care -- care of children by grandparents and other relatives - is a growing phenomenon. The AARP Grandparent Information Center reports a 7.9% increase in the number of children being cared for by their grandparents since 1994. In 1996, Counseling Today noted that in the District of Columbia, 25 percent of all children were being raised by someone other than their parent. In that same year in Pittsburgh, there was a 42% increase in the number of children removed from their parents' home -- half of those children are now in the custody of grandparents.

Grandparent caregivers who receive welfare will probably be subject to the work requirements and time limits of the welfare reform legislation¹. Each state will make individual decisions on the rules and regulations of its welfare program. In some states, grandparent caregivers may be offered hardship exemptions -- which can be provided to 20% of the families receiving welfare. According to the AARP, states have considered legislative exemptions for grandparent caregivers. Some states may choose to deal with this issue through state and/or county regulations. Specific information from states on how they will address this issue is not widely available.

California considered -- and ultimately rejected -- moving caregiver grandparents into a state grant program not funded by federal dollars, and thus, subject to the work requirements/time limits. Currently, the California Welfare Reform Conference Committee has a proposal before both the state Senate and Assembly that would exempt non-parent, relative caregivers. Other states are also deciding if they should create exemptions or designate separate state-funded programs for grandparent caregivers to provide relief from the welfare rules.

Legislation has been introduced in the U.S. House by Rep. Waters (HR 1646) and Rep. Furse (HR 1726) that would modify the federal welfare reform legislation to exempt all adult nonparental relative caregivers from work requirements, penalties for refusal to work and time limits. Also, Kinship Care legislation has been introduced in the House (H.R. 1452, Morella) and the Senate (S. 822, Wyden) to provide for a demonstration project establishing kinship care as an alternative to foster care for a child with willing adult relatives. Foster care parents usually receive more assistance through the foster program, than do relative caregivers through AFDC or TANF.

¹If the money the grandparents are receiving is only for the child(ren), it is considered a "child-only" grant and the work requirements and time limits would not apply.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Participation in the August 13-15 Kinship Care conference sponsored by the Child Welfare League to draw attention to state proposals addressing needs of relative caregivers. Note: Sec Shalala invited as speaker on final day.
- Since states may take action in this area by the fall, invite states with promising legislative proposals or regulations to a White House meeting on Grandparents Day (October 1997).