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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510 - 3505

January 22, 2020

Governor Mike DeWine
Riffe Center
77 South High Street, 30th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor DeWine:

I appreciate your Administration's efforts to enhance support services for kinship caregivers and youth in their care. Further, I am encouraged to hear that the State of Ohio will comply with the Sixth Circuit's decision in *D.O. v. Glisson*, which makes clear that "approved" kinship caregivers must receive the same payments as "licensed" foster parents.

In the midst of an addiction crisis, we must do more to repair our communities – our children demand it. Kinship caregivers are a vital resource in the fight to keep families together, reduce the trauma of family separation, and protect children's well-being. Kinship caregivers across our state have taken the brave step of opening up their homes and their hearts to raise vulnerable children who could otherwise transition into homelessness, costly foster care placements, or the juvenile justice system. Grandparents are deferring retirement, draining their savings, and continue working, with some taking on second or third jobs, in order to provide for their grandchildren. Raising children unexpectedly isn't easy—particularly for grandparents without a legal relationship to the children in their care. Federal, state, and local policies fail to recognize these challenges, which may prevent grandparents from accessing the housing, health, education, and legal services they need.

Any strategy to address this crisis and support kinship caregivers must maximize every available resource. That is why I urge the State of Ohio to submit a revised Title IV-E plan to the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services to enroll Ohio in the Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Payment (GAP) program. Use of Title IV-E funding, at the matching rate of 63 percent, will help to provide Ohio with additional federal resources and has the potential to free up Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds for additional family support efforts. The GAP program supports families and benefits taxpayers. In fact, for states with both foster care and GAP, GAP costs each state an average of \$10,000 a year per child, whereas foster care costs taxpayers \$60,000 per child.¹

¹ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/258781/GuardianshipBrief.pdf>

Despite this fact, more than 10 years after the GAP program became law, Ohio has yet to use the millions of dollars in federal resources available to it to help the growing number of children entering relative care in the state.

By leaving GAP out of the state's Title IV-E plan, Ohio fails to provide a valuable resource to kinship caregivers and the children they support. GAP funds can help caregivers access vital services including Medicaid and assistance with school enrollment. Given Ohio's general practice of "approving" relative caregivers, rather than licensing them, and then referring the children to much-smaller TANF child-only grants for their support, we are failing to fully address the needs of these children and their caregivers. For this reason, implementation of the GAP program will require that the state help relatives obtain foster parent licensure in order to access Title IV-E GAP support. Therefore, efforts to expand licensing should be led by relative caregivers, in consultation with the Children's Bureau National Model and NARA Model Family Home Licensing Standards, ensuring the adoption of family centered policies that are culturally responsive, reduce licensing barriers, and keep children safe.

We must ensure Ohio families have the resources they need to live with the stability and dignity that they deserve. Federal funds are available to help the state support these families. We should help Ohio families access these funds and not allow families to wait any longer for assistance—especially when we already have the tools and proven solutions that can help support them today. I strongly urge you to work to pursue GAP funding and support efforts to license more kinship caregivers.

I stand ready to work with you on this matter. If you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff, Shilesha Bamberg Shilesha_Bamberg@Brown.Senate.gov or Leah Hill Leah_Hill@Brown.Senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator