

June 10, 2019

The Honorable Margaret Hassan
324 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senators Hassan and Collins:

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions, we are writing to thank you for your leadership in introducing the Help Grandfamilies Prevent Child Abuse Act (S. 1181).

Every child has the right to grow and prosper in a safe and happy home. The opioid epidemic has been a major crisis that not only has taken the lives of thousands of Americans, but has displaced thousands of children with parents struggling from addiction as well as putting these children at higher risk for experiencing trauma and behavioral and mental health challenges. Thus, many of these children are being raised by kinship caregivers, such as grandparents. These caregivers deserve the same support from the government as parental caregivers.

There are currently more than 2.6 million children being raised by grandparents and other extended family, and this is largely due to the opioid epidemic.¹ Many parents either have passed away from a drug overdose, been incarcerated, or have lost custody of their children because of their drug use. This means that many states are turning to kinship, especially grandparents, to care for children placed in foster care and these newfound caregivers are presented many challenges. Studies have indicated that children who are exposed to substance abuse by their parents are at an increased risk for depression, anxiety, aggression, conduct problems, and substance abuse themselves.² After having already raised children themselves, grandparents are suddenly faced with the task of raising their grandchildren. They may struggle to meet the physical, emotional, and cognitive health challenges of the children in their care, which could detrimentally impact their own physical health and financial security.³

This bill would provide these grandparent caregivers the support and services they need in order to effectively raise their grandchildren. We recognize the importance of this legislation in ensuring that children are raised by a family member when their own parents cannot provide the care they need to thrive. Extensive research has shown that children who cannot be raised by their birth parents have more stable and safe childhoods when raised by extended family or family friends compared to

¹ <https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Documents/Grandfamilies-Report-GRANDResource-Opioids.pdf>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3725219/>

³ <https://www.asaging.org/blog/grandparents-grandchildren-and-caregiving-impacts-americas-substance-use-crisis>

being raised by non-relatives.⁴ Specifically, these children experience better behavioral and mental health outcomes, higher levels of permanency (more likely to be adopted by family members), and greater preservation of cultural identity and community connections.⁵ Through this bill, grandfamilies and kinship families would become eligible to services available under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and additional support for these families would be provided to help kinship navigate their newfound role as primary caregivers. Children who have lost a parent from the opioid epidemic and have already been through so much will positively benefit from this law and be able to thrive in the care of a family member.

Our country should provide the necessary support to ensure that all children are raised in safe and stable home environments and support the grandfamilies that are raising them. Losing a loved one is already extremely difficult, and the government should assist those who step forward to care for children in state custody in any way possible. We thank you for your leadership on behalf of children and families, and we look forward to working with you to help advance this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bruce Lesley,
President

⁴ <http://grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/16-Children-Thrive-in-Grandfamilies.pdf>

⁵ <http://grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/16-Children-Thrive-in-Grandfamilies.pdf>