



**Children's Law Center
of Los Angeles**

NEWS RELEASE

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FAMILY TIES: National study shows California is a leader in moving children out of long-term foster care into safe, secure homes with grandparents and other caregivers, and could do more with federal funds

LOS ANGELES, CA -- According to a national report released today by the nonpartisan group *Fostering Results*, many California children stuck in "permanency limbo," where reunification or adoption are not alternatives, could achieve safe, secure homes more quickly if the federal government would financially support legal guardianship by grandparents or other relative caregivers.

Miriam Aroni Krinsky, Executive Director of the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles observed, "These children are crying out for a permanent anchor with whom to bond. Increased flexibility in federal funding and greater support for relative guardianships would help ensure critically needed assistance for the many relatives who are struggling to maintain a stable, loving home for some of our community's most vulnerable children."

As highlighted in the study, California has been an early leader in the development of a program to provide subsidies to family members and others who are willing and able to assume legal guardianship for children in the foster care system. The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment program (Kin-GAP), currently serves more than 14,000 California children, 8,500 in Los Angeles County alone. The program has contributed to an overall reduction in the number of children in the state's child welfare system from over 100,000 to approximately 84,000.

Despite the success of Kin-GAP, not all eligible children and families benefit. California has been forced to fund Kin-GAP with limited state, county, and other federal resources because funding restrictions do not permit federal foster care support for subsidized guardianship, severely restricting the number who can participate.

"When children are in the safe and stable care of relatives, prolonging their stay in foster care diverts resources away from other children in need to unnecessary court hearings, caseworker visits, and administrative approvals," says Mark Testa, lead author of the report, Co-Director of Fostering Results and Director of the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "The better choice for children and families is to turn safe and

stable kinship foster placements into legally permanent homes through either subsidized adoption or subsidized guardianship.”

Without legal guardianship, performing even the simplest of tasks can become a bureaucratic ordeal, requiring prior approval by caseworkers or judges and the completion of multiple layers of paperwork. Even if courts and caseworkers determine that a child is safe and secure in the care of relatives, simple tasks like school pictures, routine medical immunizations and out-of-state trips can become a nightmare of paperwork.

Frank Mecca, Executive Director of the County Welfare Directors Association of California agrees. “In California, we are huge proponents of a federal policy that would make it possible for more foster children to safely exit the child welfare system and live with grandparents or other relatives who want to provide for their care,” said Mecca. “Grandparents on fixed incomes should not have to choose between being a legal guardian for their grandchild or having enough retirement income to live.”

The *Fostering Results* study pointed out that, in a cost-neutral approach, some states have received waivers to spend federal funds on subsidized guardianship as an alternative to subsidized foster care. In Illinois, the largest demonstration state in the nation, 2,033 children moved from state custody between 2000 and 2001 to the legal guardianship of relatives and other foster parents. Maryland, another federal waiver state, moved 152 children to permanent legal guardianship during the same two years.

“States have shown that guardianship works, and the federal financing ‘waivers’ have shown how they can help children achieve permanence,” stated Judge Nancy Salyers, Co-Director of *Fostering Results* and former Presiding Judge of the Cook County Juvenile Court Child Protection Division. “Having the option of subsidized guardianship for relatives willing to take legal guardianship can only help ensure that every child in foster care attains a safe, stable home and loving family. The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care and other experts have recommended that states be given the option to receive federal assistance to support children leaving foster care to live with legal guardians, rather than having to continue to seek waivers for an idea that has proven to work

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Fostering Results is a national, nonpartisan project to raise awareness of issues facing children in foster care. It is supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts to the Children and Family Research Center at the School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The complete report is available at <http://www.fosteringresults.org>.

Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles (CLC) is a nonprofit, public interest law corporation funded by the Los Angeles Superior Court to serve as the “voice” in the foster care system for the vast majority of the 30,000 children under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles County dependency court.

The County Welfare Directors Association of California is a nonprofit association representing the human service directors from each of California’s 58 counties. The Association’s mission is to promote a human services system that encourages self-sufficiency of families and communities, and protects vulnerable children and adults from abuse and neglect.