



## Adoptive & Foster Families of Maine Inc. and The Kinship Program

304 Hancock St. Suite 2A  
Bangor, ME 04401  
207-827-2331

333 Lincoln Street  
Saco, ME 04072  
www.affm.net

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Myer, and the joint standing committee on Health and Human Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My Name is Travis Bryant and I am the Executive Director for Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc & The Kinship Program (AFFM). I hope this information will assist you as you consider the many needs of the rapidly growing population of kinship caregivers. Much of this growth is due to the rising number of parents who are dealing with poverty, mental illness, and substance use disorders resulting in them being unable to safely parent their children. DHHS prides itself in reducing moves and additional trauma by keeping the children within their family of origin whenever possible.

AFFM has been providing support to kinship families for over 20 years. The Kinship Program provides families with information about guardianship through probate, resource referral information, and ways families can meet their basic needs. I have included a more inclusive list of supports below. In 2021 AFFM received about 490 kinship family referrals from the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) to provide support to families who were caring for a loved one's child when they entered state custody. In addition to those referred by OCFS, AFFM connected with about 350 kinship families who are not involved with the formal child welfare system, also known as informal kinship families. AFFM supported a total of 844 kinship families in 2021.

The US Census reports about 11,400 households with grandchildren living with grandparents in Maine. About 2,500 of those grandparents are considered the primary provider for their grandchildren. These numbers do not capture the number of siblings, aunts, uncles, or family friends that are caring for a loved one's child. The AFFM Kinship program currently has a staff of 4 that is serving an average of 70 new families every month, 41 of which are reffered by OCFS.

AFFM is currently working with OCFS and The University Of Maine Center on Aging to help create an evidence-based program through the child-welfare clearinghouse by using what is recognized by Generations United and Grandfamilies.org as national best practice for kinship navigation support.

There are many benefits to placing children with relatives or other kinship caregivers, such as increased stability and safety as well as the ability to maintain family connections and cultural traditions. AFFM believes that kinship families have the right to receive education, guidance, and support to help them through the unique difficulties and joys of being kinship caregivers. I am happy to answer any questions you may have and I thank you for your time.

Respectfully,  
Travis Bryant

## End Notes:

- Supports and programs provided to all kinship families:
  - Non-judgemental listening support
  - Systems navigation
    - Education
    - Child Welfare
    - Mental and Behavioral Health
    - Aging and Disability Services
    - Public and Legal Benefits
  - C.A.R.E.S. meetings (support groups)
  - Peer to peer mentoring
  - Information on how to become a licensed kinship family through DHHS
  - Annual training conference
  - Extensive lending library of books, videos, etc
  - Monthly newsletter: The Family Ties
  - Material goods (clothing, bedding, household items)
  - Discount Card Program
  - Post-adoption respite opportunities
  - Back to School Program
  - Family events
  - Museum passes
  - Holiday Gift Giving Program
  - Email listserv
  - Social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
  - Website
- References
  - United State Census Bureau  
(<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=ACSST1Y2019.S1002&g=0400000US23&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S1002&hidePreview=true>)
  - Maine Grand Facts  
(<http://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Maine%20GrandFacts%20State%20Fact%20Sheet%202021%20Update.pdf> )