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**CHILDREN SERVICES GROUP CALLS FOR FUNDING KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIPS**

Relatives, including grandparents, who provide care for the more than 3,500 children of other family members in Ohio would receive a higher level of financial support under a proposal outlined Wednesday by child services advocates and Republican state lawmakers who back the use of federal funds to support the proposal.

Crystal Ward Allen, executive director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO), explained the proposal at a Statehouse press conference where she also released a report on the subject of so-called kinship care. The report, "[Family Ties: Supporting Permanence for Children in Safe and Stable Foster Care With Relatives and Other Caregivers](#)", studied the ways the states pay for kinship care and the effect such placements have on children.

The current method used to provide financial assistance to relatives providing kinship care has the effect of working against relatives taking custody of the child because it leads to continued government involvement in the case. In many cases, relatives cannot afford to assume permanent custody of a child, Ms. Allen explained, even though the study indicates that children receiving kinship care exit foster care more quickly than those who remain in the custody of the child welfare system.

Generally, the proposal calls for using Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) money to increase the monthly payment made to grandparents or other relatives who provide for and are given permanent custody of a child and his or her siblings. According to Ms. Allen, it would cost about \$3 million annually to increase the stipend to \$250 per child per month. Additionally, relatives who incur a child daycare expense would receive an additional amount.

Among those supporting the proposal were Ohio Department of Aging Director Joan Lawrence and Rep. Linda Reidelbach (R-Columbus); Senator Kirk Schuring (R-Canton) was represented by his legislative aide.

Ms. Lawrence noted that the state currently has a TANF reserve that could be used to fund the proposal. A former legislator who helped craft many of the state's current social welfare laws, Ms. Lawrence said reforms have proven successful and asserted that the kinship care proposal can continue improving Ohio's social service system.

Rep. Reidelbach said she would work to advance the proposal in the legislature, calling it a workable plan that would also remove unnecessary government involvement in the childcare system. Once a relative gains permanent custody, she explained, there would no longer be a need for continued involvement by local childcare agencies.

Ms. Allen said the proposal has been discussed by a workgroup that the Taft Administration created to review Ohio's TANF program, specifically in light of an unencumbered TANF account balance estimated at more than \$300 million.

Jon Allen, spokesman for the Department of Job and Family Services, said the proposal, like several others made in the past few months, will be reviewed by the administration and considered in terms of the next biennial budget. "We'll consider all ideas people raise," he said, but noted that decisions will be made in the context of the FY 2006-2007 budget process.