



New Opportunities for Kinship Families: Action Steps to Implement the Family First Prevention Services Act in Your Community

The federal Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First Act), enacted in February 2018, includes many child welfare system reforms that support children, parents, and kinship caregivers. This tool highlights provisions that help kinship families, along with steps caregivers, advocates, and other leaders can take to help implement the Family First Act.

How the Family First Act Benefits Kinship Families

- Provides prevention services to children, kinship caregivers, and parents to help keep children safely out of foster care.
- Reduces licensing barriers to increase the use of kinship foster homes.
- Encourages kinship navigator programs to assist kinship families.
- Promotes family engagement for children who live in group settings.

How to Help Your Jurisdiction Receive the Full Benefits of the Family First Act

Help your state, territory or one of the 14 tribes that operate a Title IV-E child welfare agency receive the full benefits of the Family First Act by taking the following action steps:



Ensure your jurisdiction is taking advantage of the Family First Act.

- Learn your jurisdiction's policies and approaches to placing children with relatives. Do relative caregivers receive supports and services? Can they become licensed foster parents or are they caring for children outside the formal child welfare system?
- Read all materials your jurisdiction has produced about this law and share national materials with community leaders (see www.grand-families.org/Resources/Federal-Laws for national materials).
- Find out if your jurisdiction has a Family First Act implementation working group, get involved, and advocate to include individuals representing the kinship point of view.
- Use this tool to share the benefits of this law.



Offer services to prevent foster care entry.

The Family First Act provides funds to jurisdictions that choose to offer proven (“evidence-based”) prevention services to eligible children at “imminent risk” of entering foster care, their birth parents, and relative caregivers, so children can stay safely with family and not enter foster care. Services may include mental health and substance use treatment and prevention, and in-home parent skill-based services.

Other Family First Act Improvements That Impact Kin Caregivers

Extends age limits for independent living services for former foster youth to help them transition to adulthood. Many youth who leave foster care after age 16 for kinship guardianships or adoptions with relatives are eligible for these services.

- Extends to age 23 financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other supports and services to former foster youth if a jurisdiction elects to extend foster care to age 21.
- Extends eligibility to age 26 for Education and Training Vouchers.

Moves children across state lines faster for foster care, adoption or guardianship placement by requiring states to use an electronic interstate case-processing system to exchange data and documents by 2027.

Continues the Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payment program, which gives states incentive payments based on increased exits from foster care to adoption or kinship guardianship.

- Elevate effective prevention services currently used to serve children, relative caregivers and/or birth parents in your jurisdiction. If existing prevention services do not serve kinship families, could they be changed to serve them?
- Identify evidence-based prevention services that complement existing services in your jurisdiction. Check www.grandfamilies.org/Resources/Federal-Laws for more information on evidence-based services.
- Prioritize prevention services for kinship families diverted from foster care. Encourage relative caregivers who have received prevention services to become licensed foster parents for children in their care if these prevention services do not adequately assist and support the family.
- Make sure the child welfare agency requires caseworkers to discuss with parents and relative caregivers the benefits and challenges of relative caregivers becoming licensed kinship foster parents for children versus caring for children outside the child welfare system. Caseworkers should provide parents and caregivers written materials explaining the benefits and challenges.



Improve foster care licensing standards and procedures.

The Family First Act requires jurisdictions to improve their standards and procedures for licensing foster parents with related children in their care.

- Join your jurisdiction's efforts to improve foster care licensing standards by comparing your standards with the National Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards. Encourage your jurisdiction to establish a work group for this process.
- Promote diverse voices in the licensing work group, including kinship caregivers, non-related foster parents, foster youth, birth parents, people who work with caregivers and families, and those who license foster homes at the state, tribal, and agency levels.
- Share with the work group stories and examples of barriers to licensing relatives.
- Make sure the jurisdiction's efforts are relative-friendly by encouraging it to align its standards with both the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards and the National Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards. See www.grandfamilies.org/Resources/Foster-Care-Licensing
- Ensure the licensing work group compares tribal standards to National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) materials.



Establish and maintain kinship navigator programs.

The Family First Act allows jurisdictions to receive federal support to establish or maintain kinship navigator programs, which provide information, referral, and follow-up services to grandparents and other relatives raising children to link them to critical benefits and services. Programs must meet evidence-based requirements to qualify for funding.



www.grandfamilies.org

Grandfamilies.org serves as a national legal resource in support of grandfamilies within and outside the child welfare system.

Visit the site for updates and practical resources on how the Family First Act benefits kinship families.

More features:

- easy-to-use searchable database of laws and legislation impacting kinship families
- analysis and comparison of laws on many kinship topics
- resources and publications for professionals who work with grandfamilies
- timely resources tied to new developments in the field
- technical assistance and training opportunities

- Learn and share the benefits of established navigator programs. For information about existing programs visit: www.grandfamilies.org/Resources/Kinship-Navigator-Programs
- Find out if your jurisdiction applied for and received 2018 funding to develop, enhance, or evaluate kinship navigator programs and learn what they plan to do with this funding. Urge your jurisdiction to track this new funding to help them prepare to access ongoing funding under the Family First Act.
- Encourage your jurisdiction to apply for additional 2019 funding to develop, enhance or evaluate kinship navigator programs. Check www.grandfamilies.org/Resources/Kinship-Navigator-Programs for updates about applying for this new funding.
- In developing and operating a kinship navigator program, encourage your jurisdiction's public child welfare agency to engage relative caregivers and community-based organizations with experience serving kinship families both inside and outside the child welfare system.
- Support kinship navigator programs' efforts to document proven benefits to meet ongoing federal funding requirements under the Family First Act.



Involve families in residential group settings for children.

For children with serious emotional or behavioral needs requiring foster care placement in federally funded residential group settings, the Family First Act requires group care providers to engage family members in planning where to place children and helping children stay connected to their families. Family members should also be part of the children's treatment plans and receive family-based services after the children successfully leave group care. Participation by family members includes siblings, extended family members, and adults who are important to the child.

- Explore procedures and methods that your jurisdiction's child welfare agency can use to incorporate and consider family preferences when deciding where children will be placed (e.g., Family Group Decision Making).
- Determine which group settings in your area are frequently used for children in foster care and ask how they involve their families in the children's treatment.
- Demand child welfare agencies provide training, support, and licensing to relatives so they can care for related children with serious emotional or behavioral needs. Allowing relatives to become therapeutic foster parents for related children avoids placing those children in group settings. It also prepares relatives to care for children who are ready to leave group care.

Comparison of Kin Services and Supports

Before and After the Family First Prevention Services Act

<i>BEFORE</i> Family First		<i>AFTER</i> Family First
<p>Most federal money supports children in foster care—not preventing their entry into foster care</p> <p>Home of removal income test to qualify for federal foster care funds</p>	Child Welfare Funding	<p>New federal child welfare funds for prevention services.</p> <p>No income test required</p> <p>Services provided based on what children and families need to prevent entry into foster care including mental health and substance use treatment and prevention, and in home parent skill based services</p>
<p>Limited prevention services funded by different sources, often not child welfare funding</p>	Prevention Services to: Child	<p>Federal child welfare funds for up to a full 12 months of prevention services to keep children out of foster care</p> <p>Pregnant and parenting youth in foster care have access to these services</p>
<p>Limited prevention services funded by different sources, often not child welfare funding</p>	Prevention Services to: Parent	<p>Federal child welfare funds for up to a full 12 months of prevention services to keep children out of foster care</p>
<p>No federal funds for prevention services to kin</p>	Prevention Services to: Kin	<p>Federal child welfare funds for up to a full 12 months of prevention services to keep children out of foster care</p>
<p>No federal funds for prevention services to help the entire kinship triad simultaneously (child, parent, and kin)</p>	Prevention Services to: Child, Parent and Kin	<p>Federal funds for prevention services available to help the entire kinship triad simultaneously (child, parent, and kin)</p>
<p>Many state specific barriers to licensure for kin</p> <p>6-month time limit after a child's removal from parents home to qualify for federally funded foster care payments</p>	Foster Care Licensing	<p>Helps states identify barriers and best models for licensing kin</p> <p>6-month time limit no longer applies if receiving prevention services—kin may pursue licensure after provision of prevention services</p>
<p>No ongoing federal funds for Kinship Navigator Programs</p>	Kinship Navigator Programs	<p>Ongoing federal funds for Kinship Navigator Programs</p>
<p>Family engagement not required for critical decision-making</p> <p>Aftercare services not required</p>	Group Settings	<p>Family engagement, including parents, siblings and extended family, required for all critical decision-making</p> <p>Family-based aftercare supports required for at least 6 months after the child leaves group care</p>