The Fifth National GrandRally: Building a Community of Hope is a celebration of the millions of relatives responsible for raising nearly 2.6 million children when parents are unable to do so. Kinship families, also known as Grandfamilies, step up to raise children whose parents struggle with addiction, homelessness, incarceration, mental illness, or domestic violence, have died or are in the military. Family offers love and familiarity in a time of turmoil. Grandparents and other relatives make great sacrifices to care for and protect these children, and keep many from entering costly foster care. Children grow best in families.

In building a community of hope for kinship families, federal policies and programs offer multiple supports that must be maintained and strengthened:

**Keeping Families Together to Help Children Thrive:** We know children do best in families so, when parents can’t care for children, safe care with relatives must be the first option for the child welfare system, with the requisite supports relatives need to meet their caregiving responsibilities and children’s needs. Child welfare finance reforms must promote a full system of kinship services to improve children’s safety, permanence and well-being. This means helping relatives who become formal foster parents and those kinship families that remain outside the formal system by strengthening and expanding supportive services. Kinship Navigator Programs offer a cost-effective and collaborative solution. Increasing the availability of Kinship Navigator Programs must be a critical component of reform. Access to in-home services and quality mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment are especially crucial now to help families struggling from the opioid crisis.

**Ensuring Kinship Families a Full Range of Safety-Net Supports:** Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provide health, mental health and substance abuse services and treatment for children and caregivers. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Housing Assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Social Services Block Grant help support many kinship families. The Supplemental Security Income Program reaches children challenged by disabilities. Legal barriers to eligibility must be addressed.

**Maximizing the Effectiveness of Federal Support:** Increased research is needed to identify and help implement effective approaches to support kinship families. A kinship interagency coordinating body and national technical assistance center could assist statewide kinship navigators, which serve as clearinghouse for state and local support, in matching federal support with local needs and promoting peer supports across agencies and sites to assist with the varying needs of both caregivers and the children they are raising.

**Responding to the Special Needs of Older Caregivers:** The National Family Caregiver Support Program allows a state to use up to 10 percent of its funds for its Area Agencies on Aging to meet the needs of older caregivers in kinship families. Some agencies play a valuable role in meeting the needs of these families, including those with children challenged by the opioid crisis, and many more need to be encouraged to do so. The agencies can offer information and referral, support groups, and other in-home and respite services as well as financial support.

*The policy recommendations above are those of the GrandRally and do not necessarily represent the priorities of individual cosponsoring organizations.*
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