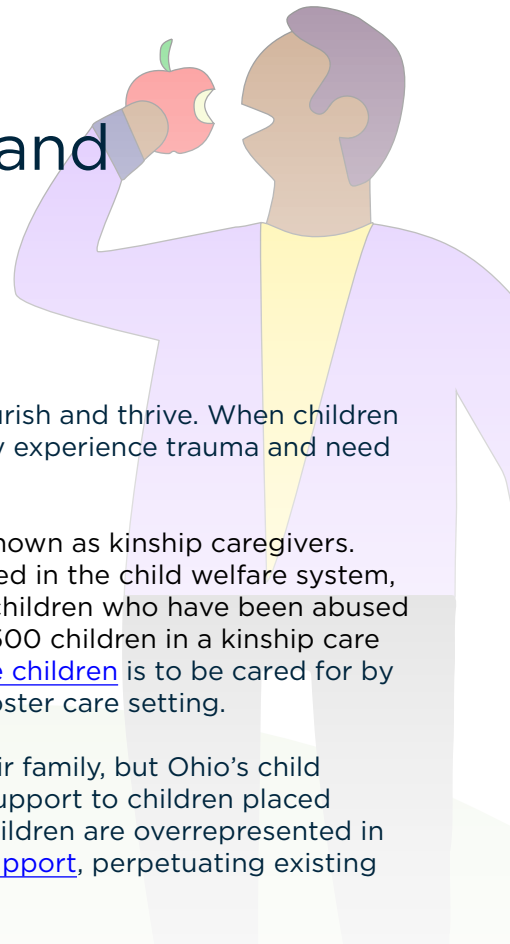




Budget Bite

Security for children and kinship families

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All children, no matter their family situation, need security and stability to flourish and thrive. When children are separated from their biological parents – even for their own safety – they experience trauma and need to be supported in a caring, nurturing home.

In Ohio, [about 124,000 children](#) live with relatives or trusted family friends, known as kinship caregivers. Although the vast majority of children living in kinship families are not involved in the child welfare system, the county public children service agencies depend on kin to care for many children who have been abused or neglected. As of November 2020, a county agency had placed roughly 4,500 children in a kinship care setting. Research shows that in most circumstances, the [best option for these children](#) is to be cared for by a grandparent, relative, or close family friend rather than a non-relative in a foster care setting.

Children should not be penalized for being placed with other members of their family, but Ohio’s child welfare funding system does just that. The state provides far more financial support to children placed with licensed foster care providers than for children placed with kin. Black children are overrepresented in kinship care settings in Ohio, where they [systemically receive less financial support](#), perpetuating existing racial inequities.

A 2017 federal court ruling was supposed to change this for children placed in the custody of a county child welfare agency. The [D.O. v. Glisson case](#) ruled that children placed with approved kinship caregivers deserve the same level of financial support as children placed with licensed foster care providers. In November 2020, after years of inaction by state lawmakers, advocates [filed a lawsuit](#) to compel Ohio to comply with the ruling.

State lawmakers responded by creating the Kinship Support Program, which [Governor DeWine signed into law](#) at the end of 2020. But the new program, like the former system, remains unfair and inequitable for children and kinship caregivers. The table below outlines how the legislation creates another two-tiered program where approved relative caregivers generally receive less financial support than licensed foster caregivers.

The Kinship Support Program is still unfair and inequitable

# of Children	County	Former monthly support for approved kin caregivers	Monthly support under the new <i>Kinship Support Program</i>	Minimum monthly support for licensed foster care provider	Maximum monthly support for licensed foster care provider
1	Cuyahoga	\$306	\$310	\$624	\$2,619
2	Cuyahoga	\$417	\$620	\$1,248	\$5,238
1	Scioto	\$306	\$310	\$836	\$4,258
2	Scioto	\$417	\$620	\$1,672	\$8,516

Source: Former monthly support for approved kinship caregivers is based on Ohio Works First (OWF) payment standards as of January 1, 2021, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), <https://bit.ly/2PXih52>. Minimum and maximum monthly support for licensed foster care providers are estimates based on [SFY 2020 foster care per diem rates](#), from Bret Crow, Office of Communications, ODJFS. Monthly support under the Kinship Support Program is based on a [\\$10.20 per diem rate](#).



The program will provide roughly \$310 per month per child to kinship caregivers. This will mean an additional \$4 a month for kinship caregivers with one child and an additional \$203 a month for kinship caregivers with two siblings, but the total monthly support is still far less than what foster care providers receive. The governor's proposed budget and the House-passed budget allocate \$34.5 million in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022 and \$30 million in SFY 2023 to fund the Kinship Support Program. The Ohio Senate needs to allocate more resources and ensure that approved kin caregivers get the same financial support as licensed foster care providers.

Another issue with the program is that the state will limit financial support for kinship families to nine months initially and later to just six months. If a grandmother on a fixed income taking care of two grandchildren doesn't get licensed as a foster parent in nine months, she will lose \$620 a month. In order to receive some cash assistance to care for her grandchildren, she would have to apply for [Ohio Works First \(OWF\) child only](#), which provides cash assistance to relative caregivers to help care for children until they turn 18. OWF child only would provide her with \$417 each month to support her two grandchildren. Applying for OWF child only is often difficult, time-consuming, and costly; there is risk that she and her two grandchildren may experience a gap in aid or even lose it altogether.

Recommendations

Kinship caregivers nurture and support children in their care the same way non-relative foster parents do but with fewer resources, less training, more stress, and limited preparation. State lawmakers must allocate additional resources to provide these children and the friends or family who care for them the basic security and stability they deserve.

Provide more financial support to approved kinship caregivers. Ohio must comply with the Glisson lawsuit by providing the same level of financial support for children placed with approved relative caregivers as children placed with foster parents. The lack of state support means that many kinship caregivers, often grandparents on a fixed income, struggle to pay for basic needs of the child in their care.

Ensure children and kinship families across Ohio have stability and security. The Glisson decision only addresses children involved in the child welfare system, which is a small fraction of the roughly 124,000 children living with kin. State lawmakers need to prioritize children and kinship families by making the following policy changes:

Provide kinship families \$600 a month per child. State lawmakers should increase the monthly OWF child only payment to \$600 per child per month to better support children and kinship families.

Restore the kinship caregiver program. The House budget partially restored the kinship caregiver program to \$10 million per year. This program provides one-time stabilization expenses, such as beds for all children. The Senate should fully restore this program to \$15 million per year to help kinship caregivers with short-term expenses.

Center kinship families in reform efforts. The state did not consult with grandparents and kinship caregivers before creating the Kinship Support Program. The Ohio Department of Job & Family Services needs to work with kinship caregivers and kinship families to reform the Kinship Support Program or develop a new program that accommodates their unique situations.