

## Strengthening Kinship Foster Care in Texas

Kinship as the First and Best Placement

### BACKGROUND

Kinship caregivers are relatives or others close to a family who care for children when their birth parents cannot and are sometimes a great alternative to a traditional foster care placement. Kinship placements allow children to maintain connections to their families and backgrounds, and often their communities. In Texas, about 44.5% of children in foster care are in kinship placements.

**There are two types of kinship placements:**

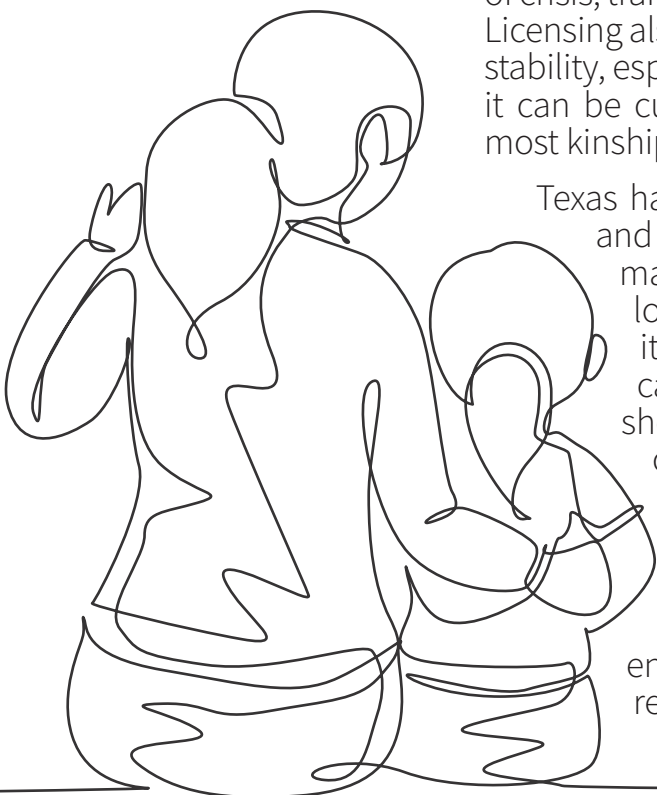
### UNVERIFIED

Unverified kinship homes with a relative, neighbor, or family friend are overseen by DFPS and HHSC. The state cannot draw down federal funds for these homes but does pay homes that meet certain eligibility criteria half of the basic daily foster care rate out of state funding.

### VERIFIED

Verified kinship homes are licensed by the state. In addition to oversight from DFPS and HHSC, these homes work with a child-placing agency (CPA) in the community. The state can draw down federal Title IV-E funding reimbursement, just like a traditional foster care home, and these caregivers are eligible to receive the full funding and services available to foster families.

**Why caregivers get licensed:** The licensing process provides critical support for kinship caregivers, not just in the form of monetary resources, but interventions in times of crisis, training, and help navigating healthcare and the court system. Licensing also connects the family with a CPA that can provide needed stability, especially as the family works toward permanency. However, it can be cumbersome and even difficult to become licensed, and most kinship caregivers are unverified.



Texas has demonstrated commitment to improving the number and quality of kinship placements, primarily because maintaining those family connections is critical to the long-term outcomes for a child. While the state has renewed its focus and efforts for kin placements, unverified kinship caregivers still struggle to access critical resources. Data shows that a child's behavior and the inability to meet a child's needs comprise a majority of the reasons that kinship placements break down.

Kinship caregivers step up to serve children with very little notice or resources. TACFS supports kin placements, and our members want to support them and ensure that they have access to the resources they need to remain stable.

## FEDERAL FUNDING INCENTIVES AND LIMITATIONS

- Texas cannot draw federal funds for unlicensed kinship care, so unverified kinship placements are paid with state General Revenue.
- Verified, or licensed kinship placement, are eligible for Title IV-E federal funds reimbursement, just like a traditional foster home.
- Licensed kinship homes that care for children who do not reunify and are not adopted, but do find permanency, are eligible for ongoing Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) payments.

## TACFS RECOMMENDS A STREAMLINED PATH TO LICENSURE AND IMPROVED SUPPORTS FOR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS

- **TACFS supports DFPS' LAR Exceptional Item Request** for additional concrete funds for kinship placements and funds to reimburse licensing costs for kin, as well as the creation of an Enhanced Permanency Care Assistance payment that mirrors the Enhanced Adoption Payment. We also support post-permanency and post-adoption requests for the agency to keep these families stable after they achieve permanency.
- **TACFS recommends directing DFPS and HHSC through Budget Rider** to develop a specific kinship licensing process, that streamlines requirements, removes commonly waived requirements, shortens the time for licensure, and more. This should build on the Provisional Kinship License in development per SB 1896 (87R).
- **TACFS recommends removing the employment requirements for kin to access daycare services.** Daycare services can allow a kin caregiver to accept the placement of a child or sibling group, particularly with a very young child, because daycare can allow the caregiver to continue to manage their own life and needs. While kin caregivers may not work or meet the existing eligibility requirements (they may be retired or not work full-time), these eligibility requirements should not hamper placement and safety of a child. Many families are simply not able to pay for safe childcare for one or more children with little to no notice and daycare services can offer a safe place for learning and growth while providing some kin caregiver respite.

