

The Progress and Promise of Kinship Care in Pennsylvania

September is National Kinship Care Month, a time to recognize and honor family members who help to take care of their own in a time of need. Removing a child from their home can be a traumatic experience for children and their parents, but one that can be lessened by the support of relatives and people they know.

In October 2020, the Pennsylvania State Roundtable commissioned the Office of Children and Families in the Courts to convene a Kinship Care Taskforce to examine the use of kinship care in Pennsylvania. The taskforce, led by Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Kevin M. Dougherty**, has spent the last four years identifying barriers and strategies to kinship care.

During that time, the taskforce has also:

- Completed a kinship care county analysis
- Compiled over 40 statutes, rules and case laws supporting the use of kinship care
- Provided statewide education to dependency judges, juvenile court hearing officers, attorneys and other dependency professionals
- Completed ongoing, in-depth data analysis.

“Every day, dependency judges across Pennsylvania are charged with making difficult decisions about a child’s safety and well-being. With increased awareness and focus on mental health and reducing trauma, it is imperative



that when necessary and safely possible, children are placed with someone they know and love,” said Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Justice Kevin M. Dougherty.

Nationally, about 35% of all children placed in out-of-home care are living with relatives or someone they know, according to data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System. Closer to home, Pennsylvania’s percentage is much higher than the national average, with 43% statewide kinship care use.

In fact, 16 counties in Pennsylvania have a 50% or higher kinship care use, including the two largest jurisdictions of Allegheny and Philadelphia.

Since the taskforce began, 24 counties have seen increases in kinship care use by 5% or higher.

Counties participating in the State Roundtable’s Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) are experiencing a much higher use of kinship care than non-FEI counties with 71% at or above the statewide average compared to only 30% of non-FEI counties.

This is evidence that FEI counties are utilizing evidence-based practices to meaningfully involve healthy family members and close friends in the lives of child welfare families.

“When a child is told they get to stay at grandma’s for a little while, it is much less traumatic. Children who are placed in kinship care are more likely to maintain connections to their culture and other family members, including parents and siblings,” said Fayette County Judge **Linda R. Cordaro**, whose county recorded 61% kinship care use in 2024.