

REPORT ON RELATIVE AND FICTIVE KIN PLACEMENTS

September 2025



CABINET FOR HEALTH
AND FAMILY SERVICES

Cabinet for Health and Family Services
Department for Community Based Services

Introduction

Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS) 605.120(5) mandates that the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS/cabinet) track and analyze data on relative and fictive kin caregiver placements and submit a report by September 30, 2020, and annually thereafter.

Report Highlights

- ◆ Formal kinship care occurs when the Cabinet places children with relatives or fictive kin caregivers due to safety threats in the home, or if a child is found to be dependent.
- ◆ Kinship care improves child well-being by maintaining family and community connection, cultural traditions, and minimizing the trauma of separation.
- ◆ Kinship care exists in both informal and formal arrangements.
- ◆ Relative and fictive kin caregivers have multiple pathways to become a formal kinship caregiver.
- ◆ The most robust financial support and resources are available to kinship caregivers who become certified foster homes with the Cabinet.
- ◆ Historically, federal regulations required the same foster parent certification standards for relative and non-relative caregivers.
- ◆ In September 2023, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued a Final Rule allowing states to adopt separate foster care certification standards for kinship caregivers, limiting them to federal safety requirements.
- ◆ In 2024, DCBS implemented new regulations for certification of kinship foster homes and for the creation of a new permanency goal for kinship caregivers, known as Subsidized Permanent Custody (SPC).
- ◆ Currently, approximately 27% of Kentucky's foster care population live with relative or fictive kin caregivers (TWS-W058 Fact Sheet). This is a 10% increase since July 2024, when the new regulations were implemented.

Importance of Kinship Caregiving

Kinship care allows children to live with relatives or close family friends instead of entering foster care with unfamiliar caregivers. Relative caregivers could be grandparents, aunts, uncles, and fictive kin are people who are not related by blood but are so close they are considered family. Research shows that kinship care leads to better outcomes for children's health and well-being by maintaining family and community connection, preserving cultural traditions, and reducing trauma of separation. Kinship Care can be either informal or formal. The Annie E. Casey Foundation estimates that as of September 2024, approximately 48,000 children in Kentucky live in a kinship care placement.

Informal Kinship Caregiving

Informal kinship care occurs when a family member, such as a grandparent or aunt, or a close family friend cares for the child without involvement of the child welfare system or legal arrangements. These agreements are private agreements between the child's parents and the caregiver, with legal custody remaining with the parents. Because these arrangements are outside

the Cabinet’s oversight, there is no formal way to track the number of children in informal kinship care.

Informal kinship caregivers may qualify for public assistance based on their caregiving role and relationship to the child and their income. They are eligible for financial and medical assistance through the Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program (KTAP) under the “child-only” eligibility option, which provides financial support for relatives caring for children. Informal kinship care arrangements can also include fictive kin caregivers. However, fictive kin caregivers are not eligible for KTAP, as this program is funded by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which limits assistance to caregivers related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

Below are the KTAP monthly rates during this past year for financial assistance based on number of children:

Number of Children	Maximum KTAP Payment
1	\$375
2	\$450
3	\$524
4	\$656
5	\$766
6	\$864
7 or more	\$964

Informal kinship caregivers may also qualify for additional support based on income, including:

- **Food assistance** through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- **Health insurance** through the Kentucky Children’s Health Insurance Program (KCHIP) (available for children placed with fictive kin)
- **Childcare subsidies** through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

Kinship caregivers can apply for these programs through their local Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) office or by applying online at kynect.ky.gov.

Formal Kinship Caregiving

Formal kinship care occurs when the Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) officially arranges or monitors a child’s placement with a relative or fictive kin caregiver. This happens when DCBS identifies safety threats in a child’s home or determines a child is dependent. Research shows that formal kinship caregiving improves outcomes for children and

youth in the child welfare system by reducing placement disruptions and increasing the likelihood of transitioning to adulthood with a permanent family.

Formal Kinship Care Options available in Kentucky:

- Temporary custody or placements through a safety plan
- Caregivers in the process of becoming certified foster homes
- Caregivers who have been approved as certified foster homes

Court Ordered Temporary Custody and Safety Plan Placement

A safety plan placement occurs when the Cabinet intervenes during an abuse and/or neglect investigation and identifies a safety threat in the home. During this period, which cannot exceed fourteen (14) days, the parent or guardian retains legal custody. If the safety concerns persist beyond the initial fourteen days, the Cabinet petitions the court to determine whether the child can safely return home or if a custody change is necessary.

Temporary custody is an option when the department identifies safety threats or determines that a child is dependent, and the kinship caregivers choose to assume custody of the child instead of the department. In these cases, the court grants legal custody to a relative or fictive kin caregiver. These cases remain under the oversight of the court and the department until safety threats are resolved, allowing the child to return home. If safety threats cannot be adequately addressed, the court establishes alternative permanent custody arrangements.

Kinship caregivers who choose court-ordered temporary custody instead of becoming a certified foster home are eligible for:

- KTAP monthly assistance (relatives only)
- In-home support services for children and caregivers
- Kentucky Kinship Information Navigation and Support (KY-KINS)
- A one-time "Relative Fictive Kin Placement Support Benefit" to help with immediate needs such as clothing, bedding, and school supplies. The benefit amount depends on the number of children in the caregiver's custody.

Relative Fictive Kin Placement Support Benefit Amounts

Number of Eligible Children	Maximum Payment Amount
1	\$350
2	\$700
3	\$1,050
4	\$1,400

5	\$1,750
6 or more	\$2,100

Relative/Fictive Kin Foster Care

For relative and fictive kin caregivers, becoming a certified foster home provides the most comprehensive support. This option includes federal financial assistance, monthly financial support payments, health insurance through Medicaid, childcare assistance, and additional resources. The primary source of federal funding for financial assistance to foster parents comes from the Title IV-E program which provides monthly “foster care maintenance payments” to certified foster homes caring for children removed from their home for safety reasons.

Federal certification rules historically required the same approval standards for both relative and non-relative foster parents. In September 2023, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued a final rule allowing states to adopt specific foster care licensing standards for relative kinship caregivers. The rule allowed states to limit these standards to federal safety requirements, reducing unnecessary regulatory barriers. In 2024, DCBS implemented new regulations for approving licensed foster homes for relative kinship caregivers.

These new standards for relative foster parent licensing are guided by the same overarching standards, but there are some differences in how they are applied:

1. Background Checks:

- Both relative and non-relative foster parents must undergo background checks, including criminal history and child abuse registry checks.

2. Training Requirements:

- Non-relative foster parents are required to complete pre-service training programs to prepare them for fostering.
- Relative/fictive foster parents have reduced training requirements as they are often already familiar with the child(ren) and their needs. All advanced trainings are available for support to the family but are not mandatory.

3. Home Study and Certification Standards:

- Non-relative foster parents must meet all certification standards, including home safety inspections, space requirements, and financial stability.
- Relative kinship foster parents may be granted flexibility for certain non-safety-related licensing standards, such as bedroom space, to accommodate the unique circumstances of kinship care. Kentucky grants those flexibilities to relative and fictive kin foster parents when appropriate.

4. Financial Support:

- Both relative and non-relative foster parents may receive financial assistance to help cover the costs of caring for the child.
- Kentucky provides a reduced stipend of \$12 a day to kinship caregivers while they are in the process of becoming a certified foster parent. Once they complete the

certification, they receive the per diem rate. The chart below lists the daily per diem rates for foster parents.

These differences aim to balance the need for child safety with the goal of maintaining family connections whenever possible. Non-familial foster and adoptive homes, along with relative and fictive foster/adoptive homes, are reimbursed at the per diem rate that aligns with their approval level. The **basic rate** is the initial rate for non-familial foster homes as well as relative and fictive foster homes. This rate is intended to cover housing, food, school-related costs, routine hair care, and incidental expenses. Relative and fictive foster parents are eligible for an **advanced rate** after two years of approval, which results in an increased daily per diem. The **degreed rate** applies only to families approved for *medically complex* status. This rate is paid to foster parents who are licensed health care professionals and are caring for a specialized medically complex child. The Medical Support Section determines and approves this per diem based on the specific needs of the child.

Foster Parent Daily Per Diem Rates	Basic	Advanced	Degreed
Birth to age 11	\$27.00	\$29.57	N/A
Age 12+	\$29.34	\$31.92	N/A
Care Plus Home	\$47.49	\$53.42	N/A
Medically Complex	\$47.49	\$53.42	\$57.00
Specialized Medically Complex	N/A	\$67.00	\$108.64
Supplemental Services Rate	N/A	\$80.75	N/A

Kentucky's New "Subsidized Permanent Custody" Option

In 2024, DCBS implemented regulations to establish a new permanency option for kinship care providers certified as relative fictive kin foster parent(s). This program is a federally authorized Guardianship Assistance Program, referred to by Team Kentucky as Subsidized Permanent Custody (SPC). For relative and fictive kin foster parents, SPC is a permanency option that's an alternative to adoption. SPC provides kinship caregivers with a monthly subsidy and medical coverage for the children, just like adoption. Unlike adoption, however, it does not require a termination of parental rights. This allows kinship caregivers to secure timely permanency and financial support while preserving the children's essential family connections.

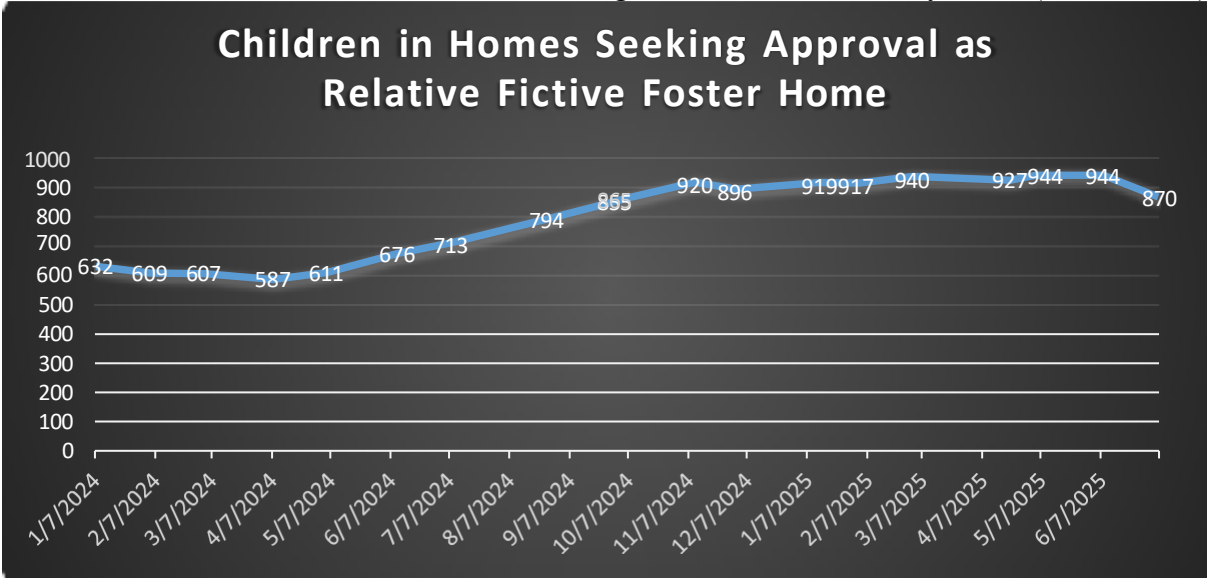
As of July 6th, 2025, 912 children placed through the Department for Community Based Services are residing with a relative or fictive kin caregiver in a certified foster home (TWS-W058 Foster Care Fact Sheet). Additionally, approximately 1,407 children are placed with relative and fictive kin caregivers in homes that are in the process of becoming certified foster homes or seeking temporary custody (TWS-W058 Fact Sheet, July 2025).

Of the 1,407 children placed through the department with relative and fictive kin caregivers:

- 49% are male and 51% are female. (No change from last reporting period.)
- 24% are placed with a fictive kin caregiver, while 76% are placed with relatives. (No change from last reporting period)

- 40% are between zero and five years old, 31% between six and twelve, and 29% are age thirteen or older (TWS-W058).

The graph below demonstrates how Team Kentucky’s Subsidized Permanent Custody program and new certification standards have led to a steady increase of kinship caregivers choosing to become a certified foster home since these changes became effective July 2024. (TWS-W058)



The department has updated the iTWIST case management system to enhance data analysis for this population. These improvements will provide more comprehensive insights by the time the next report is due.

Children placed with kinship caregivers now make up approximately 27% of the out-of-home care (OOHC) population (TWS-W058 Fact Sheet). This is a 10% increase in children being placed with kinship caregivers since July 2024.

As of June 30, 2025, 78 children have exited out-of-home care through Subsidized Permanent Custody (TWS-045D, June 2025).

In addition to the benefits this new option presents for children and their families, Subsidized Permanent Custody has a tremendous benefit on the child welfare system, with fewer termination hearings, fewer placement disruptions, and a reduction in social worker caseloads.

Additional Supports for Kinship Caregivers:

In the fall of 2024, in partnership with the University of Kentucky Training Resource Center (UK-TRC), the Beshear Administration and the Department for Community Based Services launched the Kinship Navigators program. Kinship Navigators are stationed in each of Kentucky’s nine DCBS service regions. The Kinship Navigators work in accordance with DCBS regional staff, ensuring relative and fictive kin caregivers understand the financial differences between temporary custody and becoming a certified foster home.

Navigators also connect caregivers with support programs through KY-KINS and other programs, ensuring families receive the services for which they qualify. Based on assessed needs and eligibility, families may receive:

- Case management and support services
- Counseling referrals
- Support groups and caregiver training
- Other essential resources

About KY-KINS: Kentucky Kinship Information Navigation and Support

KY-KINS is a one-on-one support network that connects kinship caregivers with certified peer supporters throughout Kentucky. Housed at the Kentucky Kinship Resource Center at the UK-TRC, this program provides both emotional and logistical support for caregivers navigating kinship care.

Certified peer supporters have firsthand kinship care experience and undergo extensive training to best meet the needs of the caregivers they support. In addition to emotional support, they assist caregivers with:

- Enrolling in insurance
- Obtaining financial assistance
- Accessing community resources

Services are tailored to each family's unique needs, ensuring kinship caregivers receive the guidance and support necessary to provide a stable, nurturing environment for the children in their care.

Conclusion

As part of Team Kentucky's commitment to strengthening families, the Beshear Administration and the Cabinet for Health and Family Services continue to expand supports for relative and fictive kin caregivers. Research confirms that children placed with kinship caregivers experience less trauma, greater well-being, higher placement stability, improved permanency outcomes, better behavioral and mental health outcomes, and stronger family and community connections. This commitment is evident through initiatives such as Subsidized Permanent Custody, KY-KINS, and Kinship Navigator. The effectiveness of these programs is reflected in the growing number of children placed with kinship caregivers across the state.