

## *Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*

December 19, 2024

The Honorable Maura Healey  
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
State House, Room 280  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Healey,

As Chairwoman of the Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (hereinafter “the Commission”), I am writing pursuant to our enabling statute which requires the Commission to file an annual report by December 31 of each year, containing our activities, our findings and our policy recommendations.

As you no doubt know, the Commission acts as a resource to the more than 34,000 grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, 10,000 of whom are doing so without the presence of one or both of the parents. This work is conducted impressively by the Commission staff members, Colleen Pritoni and Kristen Cipullo. The Commission was created in 2008 and currently consists of 15 members, including Senator Julian Cyr and Representative Paul Donato. In addition, we have an Advisory Board consisting of people with lived experience. The Commission meets monthly, and the leadership team meets on a weekly basis. The following represents our conclusion on each required topic.

### **A. *Commission activities in 2024***

#### **Workshops:**

- 13 virtual workshops/550 people registered
- Six of these workshops were a series of two or more workshops.
- For example: The Impact of Trauma on Children 0-12 years old was a two-part series
- Two in-person health and wellness workshops/70 people registered
- In person workshops held in Lynn and Walpole
- Over 600 people engaged in workshops, virtual or in-person, in 2024

**Resource Fair:**

- 85 people registered for the Resource Fair
- Held on Cape Cod (previous year held in Central, Ma. and same numbers)
- 2024 Annual Conference for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Service Providers:

245 people registered (increase of 15% from previous year)

65% of the attendees were grandparents/relative caregivers

**Regional Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Roundtables:**

- 6 regional roundtables
- Over 450 service providers participate in quarterly meetings (30+ meetings/year)
- One GRG who facilitates a Support group and attends the regional roundtables said:

“It has been 20 years since my grandchildren first came to me. I cannot believe all the work that has been done and services now available that were not there 20 years ago. My grandchildren are now grown, but it makes me so happy to know about these services that I learn about at the roundtable meetings, and I can pass along the information to the grandparents in my support group who are going through it now.”

**Newsletters/E-Mail list:**

- Close to 2,500 on e-mail list serve
- 265+ new contacts added in last quarter of 2024
- Monthly newsletter sent via constant contact
- Social Media: 775 followers on Facebook. 65 new followers were added in the last quarter of 2024

**Community Events/Outreach/Presentations:**

Representatives of the Commission participated in over 65 community events/meetings in 2024. Some examples are:

- Managed a resource table at the annual “View From All Sides Conference” sponsored by Children’s Trust Massachusetts, held in Framingham
- Participated in “Western regional foster care support roundtable” in Easthampton hosted by Treehouse Foundation

- Managed resource table at the DCF Van Wart Area Office for the Mental Health/Substance Use Resource Fair for Department of Children and Families (DCF) social workers. Received over 30 inquiries/visits/e-mail sign ups.
- Participated in the Taunton Overdose Awareness Day and managed resource table.
- Provided training/presentation to managers at statewide meeting the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and discussed resources to support kinship caregivers.

#### **Support Groups:**

- Monthly meetings with GRG support group facilitators
- Awarded 20 GRG support groups a scholarship to plan an intergenerational event
- Over 200 people participated in an event

#### **Policy/Legislative Advocacy:**

- Grand-stories: Over 20 grandfamilies participated in the Grand-Stories project, a booklet where grandfamilies were able to tell their story in their own words. Participants ranged in age, race/ethnicity, gender, geographical location, and language.
- Sponsored legislation that would allow children raised by grandparents to receive waivers of tuition and fees at public colleges and universities to the same degree that foster children receive them.
- Mosaic Grant Awardee: The Commission on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Inc. (501 c 3 non-profit that supports the Commission) received a \$300,000 3-year grant to expand outreach and programming to grandparents, relative caregivers, and children impacted by opioid crisis.
- Department of Transitional Assistance (“DTA”): ongoing meetings with DTA to increase the number of grandparents and other relatives who apply for assistance from the DTA.
- Kinship Navigator: Quarterly meetings with Kinship Navigator to support its expansion.

## ***B. Findings***

The following represents some of the findings based on the work of the Commission and our interaction with grandfamilies and the providers who serve them.

- Grandparents raising their grandchildren exist across many racial, economic and cultural groups. However, most grandfamilies do not have the economic resources they need to support the children they are caring for, especially those grandparents who have retired and were not planning on assuming the needs of a child or children.
- Grandparent-headed families are created for a host of reasons. The primary reason that most of the children come into the care of the grandparents is directly related to addiction issues, particularly addiction to opioids. There is a significant overlap between addiction and mental health issues.
- The Commission serves both grandparents who are involved with the child welfare system, the Department of Children and Families (hereinafter DCF) as well as grandparents who are not involved in that system. In the second category, grandparents tend to go to Probate and Family Court and seek guardianship of the child. In some cases, although not many, grandparents choose to adopt their grandchildren.
- Largely due to the role of addiction and other mental health dynamics, these families have very pronounced needs for mental health counseling services. These services are limited and very difficult to access. In a significant number of cases, both the children as well as the grandparents suffer from trauma that arises from a disruptive family unit impacted by addiction and or mental health issues. Trauma-informed counseling services are particularly hard to identify and access.
- Many grandparents rely for financial assistance on the “child only” grant provided by the Department of Transitional Assistance. At the Commission’s urging, DTA changed the child support requirements which will enable more grandparents to obtain these benefits. Although some grandparents are receiving these benefits, the vast majority of grandparents who are otherwise eligible do not apply for them.
- The Commission has concluded based on the above-described activities, that many grandparents raising grandchildren are not aware of the resources that are available to them. One of the Commission’s goals for 2025 is to expand outreach efforts through the state, both online and in person.

### ***C. Policy Recommendations***

- Increase the amount of financial assistance available under the TAFDC “child only” program.
- Require that the providers of legal services funded by the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) provide legal assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren in securing or maintaining guardianship of the child. The current appropriation for MLAC is approximately 49 million dollars.
- Conduct a study to determine the cost savings to the Commonwealth arising from children being raised by relatives outside the DCF system as opposed to the cost of foster care for children within the DCF system, including all indirect costs.
- Increase the appropriation for the Commission to enable the Commission to increase its outreach efforts.

Very truly yours,

Lynn A. Girton, Chairwoman

Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Cc. Clerk of the Senate

Clerk of the House

Joint Committee on Children Families and Persons with Disabilities