

Kinship care

Ohio right to boost aid to families caring for young relatives

Editorial

Older relatives often are the glue that holds families together. That's truer in Ohio than nationwide.

Nearly 10 percent of Ohio children, more than 193,000, are growing up in grandparent-headed households, according to the latest census data. The national average is 6 percent. A state program that begins on New Year's Day should help ease the burden on these 40- and 50-somethings who sacrificed convenience and leisure in favor of keeping children within families instead of in foster homes.

Families who have had custody or guardianships since July 1 will receive an initial payment of \$1,000 per child followed by a maximum of five \$500 payments per child over three years.

To qualify, the family's gross income may not exceed 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Families have been battered by a rash of social problems that result in birth parents losing custody of their kids. Those difficulties include mothers sent to jail, a rise in substance abuse and domestic violence, poverty and teenage pregnancy.

The Kinship Permanency Incentive Program, set up in the latest state budget, provides the aid, which is in addition to Ohio Works First kinship-care allocations of \$245 a month for the first child and \$77 a month for each additional child. The public assistance is much lower than the typical costs to the state for foster-home placements. But it will help hold families together by lessening financial hardship on grandparents who give up jobs to stay home with grandkids.

John Saros, Franklin County Children Services' executive director, said placing children with relatives reduces the trauma of being separated from parents.

According to the latest figures, 543 of 3,253 kids in the custody of Franklin County Children Services have been placed with relatives, at an annual savings of about \$14 million over placing those children in foster homes.

Helping families care for their young relatives makes sense emotionally, financially and as a matter of public policy. Ohio officials are doing the right thing.