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## **CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA (CWLA) SUPPORTS INTRODUCTION OF KINSHIP NAVIGATOR LEGISLATION**

**Washington, D.C.** – With several million children now being raised by grandparents and other relatives, the Child Welfare League of America applauds the introduction of *The Kinship Caregiver Support Act* by Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME). The proposed legislation would provide assistance to the growing number of American families in which children are being raised by their grandparents or relatives other than their parents. Many relatives have willingly stepped in to care for the children of family members despite great financial and emotional hardships.

For many families, the need for care by relatives is prompted by serious illness, divorce, economic hard times and death. Many relatives must also cope with their own children's problems with substance abuse, incarceration, domestic violence, and child abuse and neglect while they struggle to provide care that they sometimes can little afford. They take on these responsibilities because they are typically the best first option to nurture children who are often traumatized by their life experiences. Still they face barriers everyday that most parents do not face - from obtaining health insurance and child care for children, to enrolling in them school, and dealing with legal guardianship issues.

With over two million children being cared for by relatives, this issue has been described as a silent problem in our society – a part of a growing trend affecting millions of children and families. In 2002, 405,000 children alone lived in some form of court-involved relative or kinship care. Of that number, more than half lived in families with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level. The recently completed Pew Commission on Foster Care Report ([www.pewfostercare.org](http://www.pewfostercare.org)) acknowledges that there is a need for a basic safety net of federal support for all children needing foster care and additional supports for grandparents and other relatives who care for children.

Relatives need services like the “*Kids and Kin*” program operated by the Philadelphia Society for Services to Children ([www.pssckids.org](http://www.pssckids.org)). This program embodies concepts outlined in the legislation that would give grants to state and local agencies serving large metropolitan areas, and Indian tribal organizations to create “kinship navigator” programs. (The navigator component of the legislation seeks to address those kin families who are not looking or can't qualify for financial assistance from government agencies but still need help services, like legal advice and support groups.) “Programs and services like this can make all the difference in the world for relatives faced with the challenge of caring for kin. For that reason CWLA supports this measure that offers kin stability and at the same time allows children to be in a safe and nurturing home with family members,” said Shay Bilchik, CWLA President and CEO.

The legislation (S-2706) would also expand federal IV-E foster care funding for children in the child welfare system allowing these children a more appropriate placement with grandparents and other relatives.

Established in 1920, the Child Welfare League of America is the nation's oldest and largest membership based child welfare organization. CWLA strives to advance sound public policy on behalf of the more than nine million children and families served by its more than 1,000 public and private member agencies. To further its mission of preserving, protecting, and promoting the well-being of all children and families, CWLA conduces research, develops standards of best practice, hosts regional and national conferences, provides comprehensive, field-based consultation and professional development services, and is the largest publisher of child welfare materials in North America. Additional information can be found on the CWLA website at [www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org).

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