by Ana Beltran

Generations United is pleased to share several new practical resources and public policy advances to assist in your vital work supporting grandfamilies around the country. Last year saw the enactment of a law seeking a major shift in our nation’s child welfare system to focus on preventing children from entering foster care, and better supporting grandfamilies. The Family First Prevention Services Act calls for federal funding for prevention services for grandfamilies and kinship navigator programs, along with efforts to address foster care licensing barriers for relatives. To help implement the kinship provisions of this law, Generations United has produced several webinars, briefs and other tools. We have also been focused on creating other useful resources both for the families themselves and for those who help them, each informed by our national network of caregiver advocates known as GrAND Voices. A chart comparing adoption and guardianship, and tip sheets for grandfamilies impacted by opioids and other substance use are among the latest publications. All of these resources will be shared and disseminated more broadly through a new federal Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Council comprised of staff from federal agencies, caregivers, and other experts. Generations United will seek to help inform that Council’s work and will continue to work on behalf of all grandfamilies.

All of the resources mentioned in this article are available at www.grandfamilies.org, a national website with state and federal laws and policies, publications, and other resources impacting grandparents and other relatives and the children they raise. Launched over ten years ago, grandfamilies.org is a collaboration among Generations United, the ABA Center on Children and the Law, and Casey Family Programs.

GrAND Voices
The value in connecting advocates is beyond measure. In 2014, Generations United and Casey Family Programs kicked off GrAND Voices as a pilot with 5 members, and the network has grown each year since. Part of the growth is due to support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which funded a significant expansion with additional caregivers specifically focused on promoting culturally appropriate supports for African American, American Indian and Alaska Native grandfamilies.

GrAND Voices are now in 44 states, the District of Columbia and 11 tribes. This powerful group consists of caregivers with wide expertise and personal experience as relatives who have raised children when their parents have been unable to raise them. GrAND Voices have strong caregiver voices and help inform all of our work. They advocate for families at the federal and state levels and have testified in Congress, presented at the White House, and met with many members of Congress and their staff.
The goal for this project is to eventually elevate relative caregiver voices in all 50 states. We are close. If you know of a relative caregiver who would be a good addition in one of the following states without a current GrAND Voice, please let us know: Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Generations United’s State of Grandfamilies Reports
Among the many initiatives GrAND Voices help inform, they provide invaluable input into our State of Grandfamilies Reports, including our two most recent reports. We are also currently consulting with them for the 2019 Report, which will address housing issues.

Our 2018 State of Grandfamilies Report Love Without Borders: Grandfamilies and Immigration focuses on the intersection of grandparents and immigration. National data shows that 1 of every 5 children being raised in a grandfamily are being raised in an immigrant grandfamily. By that we mean the child, parents and/or kinship caregivers are foreign-born. Immigrant grandfamilies have the same strengths and challenges as all grandfamilies but face additional challenges with limited access to public benefits, language barriers and increased fear of government agencies often due to the situations they fled from in their countries of origin. This report seeks to lay out the challenges and respond with concrete state and federal policy and program recommendations.

Also in 2018, we updated our 2016 State of Grandfamilies Report on the opioid crisis: Raising the Children of the Opioid Epidemic: Solutions and Supports for Grandfamilies. This successful publication has helped guide state and federal policy hearings and has been referenced by national and local media.

Help for Grandfamilies Impacted by Opioids and Other Substance Use
Early in 2019, Generations United released Grand Resource: Help for Grandfamilies Impacted by Opioids and Other Substance Use, a practical resource specifically for grandfamilies impacted by opioids or other substance use. This publication includes tips and resources to help grandfamilies inside and outside the foster care system. The topics covered include:

- Practicing Self-Care
- Addressing Childhood Trauma
- Preventing Harmful Drug Use by Children
- Engaging with Birth Parents
- Talking with a Child about their Birth Parent

Resources Comparing Adoption and Guardianship
With support from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Generations United created a national overview chart and brief on adoption and guardianship for kinship foster parents. Although it is focused on those within the foster care system, it can still be helpful for those outside the system. The chart is a tool that caregivers, their families and those working with them can consult to consider all the ramifications of adoption and guardianship. The chart compares the following legal and financial implications of the two options:

- Rights and Responsibilities
- Financial and Legal Assistance
- Public Benefits
- Health Insurance
- Federal and State Tax Credits
- Caregiver Successor Planning and Death Benefits for Children
- College and Independent Living
GrandFacts: State Fact Sheets

GrandFacts: State Fact Sheets for Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children are state-specific fact sheets for each state and the District of Columbia. First developed about 15 years ago, the fact sheets are useful and popular resources for grandfamilies and those working with them. These fact sheets help connect grandfamilies with public benefits, tax credits, health and education resources, and programs that provide local services such as respite care and support groups. If you have any edits or additions to a state fact sheet, please email the changes to grandfamilies@gu.org and we will be glad to make them.

The Family First Prevention Services Act

The Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) became federal law in February 2018. Family First is a landmark law that aligns with the principle that children do best in families. Generations United has been at the national forefront of promoting the kinship provisions of the Family First Act.

For the first time, the Family First Act allows all states, territories and tribes to obtain ongoing 50 percent federal reimbursement for evidence-based kinship navigator programs that link caregivers to services and supports for themselves and the children they raise. In order to help jurisdictions meet the evidence-based and other requirements of Family First, separate federal funds were made available in fiscal years 2018 and 2019 for states, territories and tribes to develop, enhance or evaluate their programs. Forty-six states, two territories and eight tribes applied for and received 2018 funds. Delaware, Idaho, Maine, and South Dakota are the four states that did not apply. Although the funding goes to the child welfare agency, they are required by law to coordinate with existing service providers. That coordination can include subcontracting with existing providers to run all or part of the kinship navigator program. We encourage the RAPP network of providers to reach out to your jurisdictions and ensure that they know of your services as they are developing, enhancing or evaluating their kinship navigator programs. If you would like the contact information for your state, territory or tribe, please contact Diane Roznowski at droznowski@gu.org.

The Family First Act also strives to improve barriers for relatives seeking to become licensed foster parents. It requires the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to identify model family foster home licensing standards. Jurisdictions must then report on their comparison of their existing standards with that model and their use of long-standing federal authority to waive non-safety licensing standards for relatives. Although the reporting requirement was March 31, 2019, some jurisdictions have asked for extensions. Even in those jurisdictions that have already reported, we encourage you to work with your states and tribes to use this Act as an ongoing opportunity to work on removing these barriers for relatives.

We have created a number of resources to better understand and implement these kinship provisions. Resources include:

- **Family First Prevention Services Act Brief Summary: Implications for Grandfamilies**
  A detailed summary of the kinship provisions of the Family First Act.

- **New Opportunities for Kinship Families: Action Steps to Implement the Family First Prevention Services Act in Your Community**
  A practical publication developed by ABA Center on Children and the Law, Children's Defense Fund and Generations United that highlights steps caregivers, advocates, and other leaders can take to help implement Family First. It includes a chart comparing services and supports for grandfamilies before and after the Family First Act.

- **Generations United's FAQ** on the Family First Act’s requirements to help remove barriers for relatives to become licensed foster parents.

- **Webinars on the kinship navigator and licensing provisions of Family First:**

   - [Link to webinar on kinship navigator]
   - [Link to webinar on licensing provisions]
Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Council
Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Bob Casey (D-PA) announced the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act at the Fifth National GrandRally in Washington, D.C. A year later, in 2018, the law was enacted.

This law calls for the establishment of a federal task force to support relative caregivers, and its formation is well underway. Council members will include leaders from key federal agencies, grandparent and other relative caregivers, and non-federal government employees who are expert in the strengths and challenges of the families. Members have not formally been named as they are undergoing the vetting process. That process should conclude by early summer 2019, with the first Council meeting occurring prior to the end of September. The work of the Council will seek to better coordinate resources for the families and will conclude with a Report to Congress. Generations United will work to help inform the Council’s important work. There will also be a process for public input into the work of the Council.

Grand Voices Newsletter
Seeing the need to regularly share reports, resources and advances with GrAND Voices and professionals in the field, Generations United has been compiling and disseminating quarterly updates through our new online newsletter, Grand Voices. If you would like to subscribe to this free resource, please Sign up.

Conclusion
With the opioid epidemic, the media and policymakers have been more focused on grandfamilies than possibly ever in the twenty-year history of Generations United’s National Center on Grandfamilies. The media are elevating more and more inspiring grandfamilies who step up to raise children they did not expect to raise, and policymakers are taking note. They often approach Generations United for ideas on how to help improve supports. We are thrilled to be in this position and rely heavily on the experiences and expertise of GrAND Voices and dedicated professionals like you who work directly with the families. Please access and freely use all the resources mentioned here and let us know if there is anything else we can do to support your important work on behalf of these heroic families.

Ana Beltran, JD, is Special Advisor at Generations United.