



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Olympia, WA 98504-5000

January 10, 2005

TO: ESA Management Team
CA Management Team
CSD Regional Administrators
DCFS Area Administrators
Penny Black, Director HCS

FROM: *Deb Bingaman*
Deb Bingaman, Assistant Secretary
Economic Services Administration

Uma Ahluwalia, Assistant Secretary *Uma Ahluwalia*
Children's Administration

Kathy Leitch, Assistant Secretary *Kathy Leitch*
Aging & Disabilities Services Administration

SUBJECT: COMMITMENT TO KINSHIP CARE FAMILIES

Kinship care giving is the full-time nurturing and protection provided by relatives for children separated from their parents. According to the 2000 census, 35,341 grandparents in Washington were caring for their grandchildren. The health and success of many of these families is dependent upon their access to services. As a Department, we are committed to better coordinating services and improving access to services for our kinship caregivers and the children in their care. In this time of shrinking state resources, we must continue to find ways to better serve these families through efficiencies, improved communication and collaboration both within DSHS and with community partners.

Toward this end we are endorsing revival of the internal DSHS working group on kinship care, comprised of program staff from various divisions within Economic Services Administration, Children's Administration, and Aging and Disability Services Administration. The mission of this working group will be to bring greater overall coherence to our kinship care efforts, in support of and parallel to the excellent work being done by the Kinship Care Oversight Committee mandated by the Legislature. Division Directors will support this effort through appropriate staffing of the working group and timely attention to the recommendations that may emerge as a result of the group's efforts.

We envision the DSHS Kinship Care Working Group identifying breakdowns in communication, gaps in service and barriers to access and to make recommendations to executive management about how to correct these problems. Likewise, we expect the Working Group to identify places where our kinship families are currently being served well and to suggest ways to extend these “best practices” statewide.

Some specific issues we want the Working Group to explore include:

- Improved communication and coordination among administrations and divisions with kinship families as shared clients
- Improved communication and coordination between headquarters and field staff related to serving kinship families
- More efficient mechanisms for kinship caregivers seeking information about or access to DSHS services, including single points of contact
- Ways to ensure greater uniformity in the Department’s treatment of kinship caregivers around the state

Finally, we would like our administrations’ key representatives on the Kinship Oversight Committee – Barbara Bofinger from Children’s Administration, Hilari Hauptman from Aging and Disability Services Administration, and Tom Berry from Economic Services Administration– to take the lead on reconstituting the Kinship Care Working Group.