



THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON

KINSHIP CARE

Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

30th September 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your appointment and welcome back to the Department for Education.

During your time as Minister of State for Children and Families back in 2018, at the launch of the Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care, we were delighted to hear you commit to being the 'voice of kinship care in Government'. We look forward to supporting you in continuing to be that voice as Secretary of State, particularly in relation to the imminent Spending Review. We would also be delighted if you would meet with our All Party Parliamentary Group on Kinship Care.

Our Group shares a common interest in championing kinship care as a way for children to live safely and thrive within their family network when they cannot remain with their parents. We also seek to improve recognition and support for kinship carers across the UK, and the children they are raising.

Last year, the inquiry by the Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care found kinship care to be, too often, an afterthought across public services and our child welfare system. They also identified 'untapped' potential for working with families so that more children can remain in their family and friend network. Our APPG is building on the Taskforce's work. With the number of children in the care system in England surpassing 80,000 on the eve of the pandemic, a renewed emphasis on working with, and supporting families, is needed more than ever.

Over 180,000 children across the UK are raised in kinship care. The evidence shows that when children can't remain at home, the next best place for them to live is in their wider family and friends network with important benefits including for identity and belonging. It's better for the child, wider society and has potential cost benefits for the taxpayer too. There is also a large amount of evidence, including from our constituency casework, showing that kinship carers and the children they are raising face many adversities and often struggle to access support commensurate to their needs.

We would recommend putting the Taskforce report on your reading list, particularly in informing your discussions with the Treasury on the Spending Review. As Josh MacAlister has stated in his recent submission to the Spending Review, the costs of children's social care continue to rise. It's a choice between spending ever increasing sums on crisis interventions and placements in the care system or investing in early, preventative support and the family and community network. We would endorse the Review's initial call for investment in early family help, to support more children to remain safely at home and for supporting children to live safely and thrive in kinship care when they cannot.

The Taskforce report made a series of policy recommendations for national and local government and public agencies. There are many areas where we have a common interest in seeing change. Peer-to-peer support through local kinship support groups has been crucial during the pandemic particularly to prevent isolation and the temporary flexibilities your Department made to the Adoption Support Fund have supported some more carers to access this. The recent £1 million investment from your Department into kinship care support group provision is a welcome step and we hope it marks the start of addressing the postcode lottery in local support services. Moreover, many prospective kinship carers struggle to get legal advice or representation. The government's welcome commitment to reforming and extending legal aid for special guardians has not yet been implemented. There is an opportunity for the Ministry of Justice, your Department and our APPG to work together on the scope of these changes and to ensure they are delivered this year. These are just two examples of common



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areas of interest where we can work together to make meaningful change so more children can thrive in kinship care.

The prominent position kinship care has been given within the remit of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England is welcome and we recently met with Josh MacAlister to discuss this further. We also look forward to Kinship Care Week, beginning 4th October, which is an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of kinship care and to celebrate the tens of thousands of kinship carers across the country. We hope the Government will be supportive too.

We look forward to working with you, your Department, colleagues across government, and the Care Review, to make the case for better recognition and support for kinship care. In relation to the Spending Review, we have copied this letter to the Chief Secretary of the Treasury.

Our secretariat, Family Rights Group, would be happy to make the arrangements for attending an APPG meeting and can be contacted via Jordan Hall jhall@frg.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Gwynne MP, Group Chair

Tim Loughton MP, Vice Chair
Catherine McKinnell MP, Vice Chair
Helen Hayes MP, Vice Chair
Baroness Armstrong, Vice Chair
Ian Byrne MP, Vice Chair

cc.

Simon Clarke MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury