



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

ELIZABETH HERTEL
DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 4, 2025

CONTACT: Erin Stover
517-241-2112
[EStover@michigan.gov](mailto:ERStover@michigan.gov)

MDHHS Director Elizabeth Hertel visits Wayne County MDHHS office to discuss kinship care program successes

Nearly \$90 million included in Governor Whitmer's FY26 budget to help keep kids safe

LANSING, Mich. – Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Director Elizabeth Hertel joined with kinship caregivers, advisory council members and kinship support staff at the MDHHS South Central Wayne Office in Detroit to discuss how the state is continuing its commitment to ensuring Michigan children safely remain with their families through kinship care. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's recently announced FY2026 budget includes nearly \$90 million in investments focused on meaningful, timely and effective services and supports to help kids safe.

Kinship care is the full-time care, nurturing and protection of children by family members or other important adults in the child's life. This could include grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings or family friends. Kinship care can occur when a child is placed through the MDHHS foster care system or through an arrangement made outside the child welfare system between the parent and the kinship caregiver.

"Michigan has been a national leader in kinship care and believes children who need placements outside their homes should be placed with relatives or other close family friends whenever possible," said Elizabeth Hertel, MDHHS director. "This allows children to maintain connections with relatives, friends and communities they know and aligns with our priority to keep families together when it is safe to do so."

MDHHS has been piloting kinship support workers in nine counties. Their roles are to help identify potential kin caregivers and provide support and placement services. The FY26 proposal includes \$24.4 million to expand the program statewide.

"I'm excited about the reach these budget items will have," said Lara Bouse, executive director of Fostering Forward Michigan. "Providing funding that creates access to supports and resources for all kinship families across the state will go a long way to support families. Kinship family arrangements are our first line of prevention for removal of children and foster care, these families deserve direct support and resources that meet their unique needs."

Michigan has 10,000 children in the foster care system with nearly half of those children currently placed with relatives. Placing children with people they know can help minimize trauma and loss associated with foster care placement and decrease the



Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Director Elizabeth Hertel joined with kinship caregivers, advisory council members and kinship support staff at the MDHHS South Central Wayne Office in Detroit to discuss how the state is continuing its commitment to ensuring Michigan children safely remain with their families through kinship care.

amount of time spent in foster care. MDHHS works with the Kinship Care Resource Center (KCRC) at Michigan State University (MSU) to provide support, trainings and other outreach for kinship caregivers.

“The Michigan State University Kinship Care Resource Center is proud to support all kinship caregivers raising relative children, ensuring they have the information, referrals and resources needed to provide safety and stability for their families,” said Michele Brock, Director of Community Programs, MSU School of Social Work. “Thanks to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services’ commitment to prioritizing kinship caregivers who have stepped up for family, KCRC can step up for them – offering the only statewide toll-free service at 800-535-1218, designed specifically for kinship families. With dedicated navigators, most of whom are kinship caregivers themselves, and expanded partnerships with community organizations like UPCAP, D.A. Blodgett, Hands Across the Water, Spaulding for Children and Child and Family Services, KCRC is reaching more families than ever to ensure they have the support and information they need to thrive.”

FY2026 Budget Recommendations

Governor Whitmer’s FY26 budget recommendation also includes the following investments designed to keep kids safe:

- \$27 million to help at-risk families maintain independence outside of the child welfare system. This investment will add staff to serve as liaisons between families and child welfare workers. Staff will provide additional support to families working through the child welfare system and provide economic and concrete supports to at-risk families to avoid extended involvement.
- \$17.5 million to improve adoption supports by expanding access to the Adoption Medical Subsidy program, restructuring rates paid to private adoption agencies, and expanding Medicaid eligibility.
- \$13.3 million to provide enhanced treatment foster care services to children where they are and create a Professional Foster Parent Program supporting children with complex medical and behavioral health needs.
- \$10.6 million to implement recommendations made by the Governor's Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform, including prevention and intervention services.
- \$1.9 million to invest in independent living services for older youth in foster care.
- \$3.5 million to help young adults exiting the child welfare system successfully transition to more independent living arrangements in adulthood by ensuring they can retain their federal financial benefits, such as Social Security. On a national basis, 10% of foster children are each entitled to an average of \$700 in Social Security benefits every month.
- \$325,700 to fully fund services designed to prevent the breakup of Native American families by increasing the rate paid to private agency foster care providers for these services.

###