Using Title IV-B to Fund Peer Support for Kinship Families

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The Network has received questions from states and organizations serving kinship families about the ability to use federal funds to pay for peer support programs, including peer mentorship and support groups. The Supporting America's Children and Families Act, signed into law in January 2025, provides additional clarity, detailing that certain funds in the federal Title IV-B program can be used for these services and naming kinship families as populations that are specifically eligible. These changes took effect on October 1, 2025.

Background: Peer Support Was Possible Before, but Not Every State Used It

Title IV-B, subpart 2, the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families program (PSSF), provides states and Tribes with flexible funding for community-based services in four categories: family preservation, family support, family reunification, and adoption promotion and support. Even before the new law, those categories left room for peer support and several states have used Title IV-B funds for these purposes, including peer support designed for kinship caregivers.

In North Carolina, the state child welfare agency contracts with the Children's Home Society of North Carolina for Caring for Our Own, a PSSF-funded program for kin caregivers that provides peer support for families as they work toward foster care licensure.[1] In Kentucky, the state's post-permanency program, which utilizes Title IV-B funding, includes Adoption Support for Kentucky, which offers peer-led support groups for foster, adoptive, relative, and fictive-kin caregivers. In Massachusetts, the Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, which provides support groups for grandparents and other caregivers, receives some of its funding through PSSF.

However, while states and Tribes could use these funds for peer support, many did not because, outside reunification services, peer support was not named explicitly as an allowable expense and kin caregivers were not explicitly listed as a target population. Some definitions referred to "extended" families, while others, such as respite care, did not mention kin at all. Recognizing that states were reluctant to fund services that were not directly enumerated, Congress specifically wrote peer support and kin caregivers into the Title IV-B statute, providing additional clarity to alleviate any fears that funds could be taken back. The Network's Federal Funding Primer describes more of the ways states use Title IV-B to support kinship families.

What the New Law Says

The Supporting America's Children and Families Act makes several changes to PSSF that

[1] Detailed in the state's annual progress report: https://www.ncdhhs.gov/nc-fy2024-apsr-second-revisions-submitted-9823/download?attachment

matter for peer support and for kinship families.

Peer-to-peer mentoring and support is now a named service. States must spend a significant portion of their PSSF funds in each of the four service categories, and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), which oversees Title IV-B, generally expects at least 20 percent of PSSF funds to be spent on each. In the Supporting America's Children and Families Act, Congress explicitly allowed spending on "peer-to-peer mentoring and support programs" to count toward any of the four categories. The program must be related to the children and families in that category, and it must itself have "demonstrated experience fostering constructive relationships between children and families and mentors with relevant lived experience or interactions with the child welfare system." A peer support group for kin who have adopted, for example, could count as adoption promotion and support.

Kinship families are specifically named as a target population. Though many states have provided PSSF-funded supports to kin caregivers, including them among foster families, others have been reluctant to do so. The law explicitly adds kinship families and caregivers to the statute by amending several PSSF definitions. Family preservation services now explicitly cover "kinship and adoptive families" at risk or in crisis. Respite care now provides "temporary relief for parents, kinship caregivers, and foster parents." Family support services now aim to "increase the strength and stability of families (including adoptive, foster, and kinship families)." Family reunification services now cover children placed "with kinship caregivers." Together, these changes clarify that kinship families are able to receive services that are available to non-kin foster families.

Family resource centers can build peer support for kinship families. The law defines a family resource center as a community- or school-based hub of support services that, among other things, "builds communities of peer support for families, including kinship families, to develop social connections that reduce isolation and stress." PSSF family support services can be provided through family resource centers, and that spending can also be counted toward any of the four categories.

Services can reach young adults. The law defines "youth" as anyone under age 26 and adds youth to the family preservation and family support definitions, including young people raised in kinship families.

What This Means for Organizations Serving Kinship Families

Providers can seek PSSF funding through their state or Tribal agency. PSSF funds go to state and Tribal child welfare agencies, which often contract with community organizations to deliver services. Organizations that offer peer support groups, peer mentoring, or kinship caregiver councils can work with their state or Tribal agency to receive PSSF funding through a contract or subgrant.

Funds can cover the costs of the service, including paying people with lived experience. PSSF funds can pay for the allowable costs of these services. That includes compensation for people with lived experience who serve as peer supporters, peer mentors, or members of advisory councils.

States still decide how to use PSSF. The new law makes these uses clearly allowable, but it does not require any state to fund them. Since PSSF funds are limited, many states will have already allocated their spending under the program or may prioritize other uses for available funds, so organizations interested in this funding may want to share with agency leadership the needs kinship families in their state face and how peer support could help meet them. A good place to understand how a state currently utilizes its PSSF funding is to look at the state's Child and Family Services Plan, which states submit every five years, detailing their plans for PSSF and other funds, and which they provide updates on annually.

A Role for Kin Caregivers in State Planning

The Supporting America's Children and Families Act also changes who states must consult when developing those plans. States must now consult "parents with child welfare experience, foster parents, adoptive parents, and kinship caregivers" along with "children, youth, and young adults with experience in the child welfare system, including State boards and councils comprised of youth with lived experience." States can use title IV-B, including Court Improvement Plan funds, to pay travel, childcare, and compensation for lived experts for specific child welfare purposes. See the Child Welfare Policy Manual 7.4, Q/A #8 for guidance. The Network also has a resource for how to meaningfully engage lived experts.

For kinship caregivers and the organizations that serve them, this creates a formal way to take part in decisions about how Title IV-B funds are used, including whether a state funds peer support for kinship families. Kinship caregiver councils and advisory groups are one way that states can carry out this consultation.

Where to Learn More

As of this writing, ACF has not issued guidance on these provisions beyond its 2025 information memoranda.

- The PSSF service definitions, as amended: 42 U.S.C. 629a
- The full text of the law: Supporting America's Children and Families Act (P.L. 118-258)
- ACF's information memoranda on the law: IM-25-04 and IM-25-05
- The Network's overview of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program

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