



OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

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Lakota Oyate Wakanyuja Onicakiyapi - Lakota People caring for children.

I am Susan Schrader, Oglala Sioux Tribe-Child Protection/ICWA Director and I am submitting this written testimony to the Interim Rules Review Committee, South Dakota Legislature in support of the proposed SDDSS Kinship Care Licensing Policy.

For the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Kinship Care is central to our history, customs and values. When children and teens must be separated from their parents, our Tiwahe (family) and Tiospaye (extended family) will step in. Also, our Hunka (Making Relatives) ceremony creates kinship relationships for children and teens with significant individuals and their family, creating more extended family for the youth. Our ancestors cared for children when no parents were available and we continue that tradition to this day. When children are placed in kinship care, it is family reunification.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe - Child Protection Services fully embraces the pivotal role that kinship caregivers play in the well-being, stability and permanency of the children and teens we serve. We support the Kinship Care Licensing Policy proposed by the South Dakota Department of Social Services and feel that the proposed policy assists tribes in ensuring that a family is available for every child or teen that needs one in a time of crisis.

In kinship care, children and teens thrive. There is less stress and trauma associated with being separated from family and living with strangers. In kinship care, the children and teens are among people who love them, who know their family history and will remain committed.¹

We know that kinship and relative caregivers most often open their home to large sibling groups, maintaining important sibling relationships, allowing siblings to grow up under the same roof. Too often, brothers and sisters are split among several foster homes and may never to be reunited.²

Permanency is achieved more often when children live with kin. If a child is not able to return to their parents, the kin caregiver will become the long-term family for the child or teen via Subsidized Guardianship. In addition, when a youth reaches age 18, there is no “aging out” that often leads to homelessness, poverty and survival behaviors. With a kin family, these young adults continue their living with their family and have the necessary support leading to better outcomes as adults.³

In South Dakota and nationally, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit foster parents. With kinship care, we are able to identify a family specifically for that child or teen. Currently, OST-CPS is involved with over 500 children and their kinship families that are not licensed. We know that there are another 400+ Oglala Sioux kinship families, that are struggling to care for children and teens on their own without any support or involvement with OST-CPS because they found the licensing process too difficult and cumbersome to navigate.

These children/teens are not receiving the benefits and assistance that being in a licensed kinship home would provide.

The proposed Kinship Licensing Policy will eliminate many unnecessary obstacles and barriers to licensure for these families while not compromising the safety of the children. Being licensed and being Title IV-E eligible means kinship parents receive help, services and financial support to best provide care, love and nurturance...keeping each child and teen safe, stable and secure.⁴

We, the Oglala Sioux Tribe, believe that the proposed Kinship Care Licensing Policy is essential to the Tribe as we continue our time-honored tradition of kinship care today and for generations to come.

Thank you, Representative Hansen and members of the committee for reading my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Schrader
Oglala Sioux Tribe
Child Protection/ICWA Director

References:

¹Winokur, M., Holtan, A., Batchelder, K., Systematic Review of Kinship Care Effects on Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being Outcomes. (December 2015). Research on Social Work Practice , 28(1.)

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288888726_Systematic_Review_of_Kinship_Care_Effects_on_Safety_Permanency_and_Well-Being_Outcomes

² Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2022). Kinship care and the child welfare system. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinship/>

³Marc A. Winokur, et al., Matched Comparison of Children in Kinship Care and Foster Care on Child Welfare Outcomes, 89 FAMILIES IN SOC'Y: J. CONTEMP. SOC. SERVS. 338 (2018),

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1606/1044-3894.3759>

⁴Separate Licensing Standards for Relative or Kinship Foster Family Homes.

A Proposed Rule by the Children and Families Administration on 02/14/2023.

[https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/02/14/2023-03005/separate-licensing-standards-for-relative-or-kinship-foster-family-homes#:~:text=The%20current%20regulation%20requires%20the%20same%20licensing,licensing%20or%20approval%20standards.%20\(Children%27s%20Defense%20Fund.](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/02/14/2023-03005/separate-licensing-standards-for-relative-or-kinship-foster-family-homes#:~:text=The%20current%20regulation%20requires%20the%20same%20licensing,licensing%20or%20approval%20standards.%20(Children%27s%20Defense%20Fund.)