

COMMISSION ON GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

CITY OF HARTFORD

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
COMMISSION ON GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

2 HOLCOMB STREET, C/O GRANDPARENTS PROGRAM

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06112



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February 23, 2005

Mayor Eddie Perez
Council President Hernan LaFontaine
Court of Common Council Members
City of Hartford, City Hall
550 Main Street
Hartford, CT 06103

RE: Annual Report on Activities and Recommendations

Dear Mayor Perez, Council President LaFontaine, and Council Members:

Section 2-147 of City Ordinances requires this Commission to “no less than annually apprise the council of its activities, progress and its recommendations as to the need for implementation of local programs for grandparents raising grandchildren.” In pursuit of that, we submit the following.

Our Activities:

In addition to participating in events planned by the City Grandparents Program, such as the Fundraiser Gala, a rally at the State Capitol, and the Grandparents Day party at Bushnell Park, we have sought alliances with other individuals and groups with similar goals, and established a legislative agenda, which we will be pursuing actively this session. Many of our members participated in two Lobbying Trainings last fall in preparation of this.

As you know, we met with the mayor and presented a program for the Council as A Whole to solicit support for our efforts. Our members also have been on television to discuss the issues of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, including Councilperson Elizabeth Horton Sheff’s Community Council show, and Fox 61 News.

As a prelude to our legislative work this session, we laid the groundwork for one bill by meeting last spring with representatives from InfoLine to propose the creation of a dedicated, toll-free hotline specifically for grandparents and other kin caregivers to meet their specific needs (this is sometimes referred to as a “Kinship Navigator”). This fall, our participation in a “work group” convened by Senator Toni Harp and Representative Peter Villano gave us the opportunity to meet with other advocates and State Commissioners (or their representatives) from the Departments of: Children and Families; Social Services; Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS); Public Health; Mental Retardation; and Education. The purpose of the meetings has been to discuss how those agencies can better serve kinship caregivers within existing programs and to a limited extent, with new programs. The group is in favor of the toll-free hotline, and it appears that we have much support for that Bill, one of our three legislative goals.

The work group mentioned above hopes to see demonstration programs funded by DMHAS in three major cities, including Hartford, to build on existing programs for grandparents and other relatives raising children. We have put forth a separate idea for a 14- week educational program for caregivers about parenting the "second time around" titled "Empowering Kinship Caregivers" using a model curriculum by a Fordham University professor, Dr. Carole Cox. We have established a local relationship with Dr. Karen Bullock, a professor at the UConn School of Social Work, who expressed willingness to teach the course if the program is implemented and funded. Dr. Bullock does research in the area of grandparent caregivers.

Last, we hosted a "Call to Action Forum" on February 9th in City Hall to garner support for our legislative goals from other like-minded advocates. Legislators were invited as well. Representative Marie Kirkley-Bey attended and gave us many invaluable pointers. Representatives from the Child Advocate's office, Commission on Aging, Children in Placement, and the Salvation Army were among those present, as well as Mayor Perez and Councilwoman Horton Sheff.

Recommendations as to the need for implementation of local programs:

The needs of this population far outweigh resources. We narrowed our recommendations to these:

- 1) Use political capital available to the Mayor's office and Council members to support our 3 legislative goals (see enclosed brochure).
- 2) Become familiar with and support worthy demonstration programs that emerge for this population in Hartford.
- 3) Add at least one part-time person to the Grandparents Program, who is knowledgeable in the area of the issues concerning grandparents raising grandchildren. Case management *and* program and policy development is more than one full-time person can do. There is no other central place in the City to refer grandparent caregivers for case management specific to these issues, and no *better* place than the Grandparents program, which is sensitive to the population's needs. The need for policy and program development is also crucial and should not be abandoned. (Two part-time people would better meet the City's needs for this population, realistically.)
- 4) Continue the work of the City Grandparents Program to establish more peer support groups for children at school—based on the model at Clark School.
- 5) Promote more good support groups for caregivers throughout the City, perhaps at neighborhood community centers, and/or Family Resource Centers at public schools. Foster relationships with schools and local agencies in pursuit of this.
- 6) Try to centralize a database of respite and other activities available to Grandparents and the children they are raising (not necessarily programs *limited* to them) in the City of Hartford—through existing programs in the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Public Library, and community groups. This information can be provided to the toll-free hotline when it is established, and in the meantime, can be made available to the public through the City Grandparents Program.
- 7) Continue to support adequate affordable housing for grandparents suddenly faced with the need for a larger, child-friendly home, including, but not limited to, the Grandfamilies Housing Project.

Thank you for your attention. We are available to follow up with more information on any of these recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

Christina LaMorte
Chair

Enclosure: brochure with summary of legislative agenda