

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 10, 2017

For more information contact:

Patti Hassler, Vice President of Communications and Outreach

202-662-3554 (office)

phassler@childrensdefense.org



FIFTH NATIONAL GRANDRALLY BRINGS HUNDREDS OF GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER RELATIVES RAISING CHILDREN TO THE U.S. CAPITOL

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today hundreds of grandparents and other relative caregivers from across the country gathered on the front lawn of the U.S. Capitol today for the Fifth National GrandRally: Building a Community of Hope for grandparents and other relatives raising children. They traveled to Washington, many of them on buses, to join Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), and Bob Casey (D-PA) and a community of advocates to recognize and celebrate the critical role kinship families, also known as “grandfamilies,” play in providing safe, loving, permanent families for children and to educate lawmakers about the important role federal policies and programs play in ensuring essential support to kinship families. Michelle Singletary, the Washington Post’s nationally syndicated columnist who was raised by her grandmother, was Master of Ceremonies.

“Grandparents and other relatives are our nation’s best natural resource when it comes to making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children,” Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon said. “In times like these, with so many communities struggling with the opioid epidemic, it’s grandparents and relatives who are often the first to step up and take care of the children who are left behind. I am proud to stand with the families who are improving the lives of children every day. I am going to keep fighting to make sure Congress doesn’t pull the rug out from under them and gives these families the help they need.”

Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa, co-chair of the Senate Caucus on Foster Youth and champion of policies for children thanked the grandparents and other relatives for what they do., He said, “When grandparents and other relatives like you are willing to step in and raise your grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or younger siblings, you’re providing more than just a safe place to sleep. You’re providing the care, support, and stability that all children need. By opening your homes and providing love and safety for these children, you’re creating a foundation for a better future.”

Brittney Barros, 19-years-old, spent four years in Michigan’s foster care system before being placed with her grandmother, and spoke about the power of keeping children in the family. She said, “Since my mom’s rights were terminated my only hope and dream was to live with my grandmother with my brother and sisters. After numerous foster homes, group homes, and battles in court, my grandmother finally won guardianship of myself and two out of three other siblings. When I was placed with my grandmother I was beyond relieved – no more group homes, no more instability, no more wondering if I was going to be removed and having to adjust to yet

another school and another life. She saved us from many years of turmoil, trauma, and the many dynamic issues youth face from the foster care system. This rescue is what every foster youth deserves.”

Donna Butts, Executive Director of Generations United, a sponsor of the GrandRally, said: “While grandparents and other relatives have long been called upon to raise children for many reasons including parental substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, homelessness, incarceration, military service and death, the current opioid crisis is overwhelming many grandfamilies and the child welfare system. We need to recognize the vital role these grandfamilies play in America.”

For every child in foster care, nearly 20 children are being raised by relatives outside the child welfare system and are receiving little to no support. There are more than seven million children living in households headed by a grandparent or other relative, and nearly 2.6 million of them are being raised in kinship families with no parent present. Nearly 2.7 million grandparents are householders responsible for their grandchildren who live with them, and one in five of them live in poverty. Federal policies and programs make big differences in the lives of relative caregivers and in the lives of the children they raise.

The GrandRally also featured testimonials of relative caregivers from Texas and Maine, other youth raised by kin, kinship allies, and musicians raised by or raising relatives, including A Second Chance, Inc. Choir from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and musician SaulPaul from Texas who performed an original song dedicated to his grandmother who raised him.

Caregivers not able to come to Washington joined the GrandRally virtually in group events across the country and called their members of Congress to support the relatives raising children who gathered on Capitol Hill.

“Every child in America deserves a safe, supportive and permanent family,” Dr. Sharon McDaniel, Member of Casey Family Programs Board of Trustees, and Founder, President and CEO of A Second Chance, Inc. said before the rally. “More and more, grandparents across America are fulfilling this vital role. Casey Family Programs is proud to partner on this important event to honor grandfamilies' commitment to building communities of hope for their youngest members and to recognize that everyone has a role to play in creating hope and opportunities for children and families.”

The Fifth National GrandRally was sponsored by Casey Family Programs, Generations United, Children’s Defense Fund, AARP, FosterClub, GrandFamilies of America, and National Kinship Alliance for Children.

For more information about the GrandRally, please visit: www.GrandRally2017.org

###

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With nearly 38 million members and offices in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also works for individuals in the marketplace by sparking new solutions and allowing carefully chosen, high-quality products and services to carry the AARP name. As a trusted source for news and information, AARP produces the world's largest circulation publications, AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.

[Casey Family Programs](http://www.caseyfamilyprograms.org) is the nation’s largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care and building Communities of Hope for children and families across America. Founded in 1966, we work in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories and with more than a dozen tribal nations to influence long-lasting improvements to the safety and success of children, families and the communities where they live.

The [Children's Defense Fund](#) Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

[FosterClub](#) is about providing youth a voice within the system that so heavily affects their lives. Whether advocating on their own behalf, in concern for siblings or family members, or speaking out on behalf of their 400,000+ peers currently in the system; our websites, publications, and events provide a youth-friendly network which helps the voices of young people to be heard.

Generations United is home to the National Center on Grandfamilies, a leading voice for issues affecting families headed by grandparents and other relatives. Through the Center, Generations United leads an advisory group of organizations, caregivers and youth that set the national agenda to advance public will in support of these families. Center staff conduct federal advocacy and provide technical assistance to state level practitioners and advocates and train grandfamilies to advocate for themselves. The Center raises awareness about the strengths and needs of the families through media outreach, weekly communications and awareness raising events. It offers a broad range of guides, fact sheet and tools for grandfamilies, which cover issues from education and health care access to financial and legal supports and can be found at www.gu.org.

[Grandfamilies of America](#) is a nonprofit organization focused on supporting grandparents and other relatives raising children. GrandFamilies of America strives to preserve family ties and heritage for future generations by bringing together kinship caregivers from across the country and providing them with the education and tools they need to navigate complex government systems to ensure safety, stability and permanency for the children in their care. We do this through collaboration with these caregivers, child welfare advocates, other organizations and agencies, who share our vision. We dedicate our energy to empowering caregivers to take back control of life altering decision-making, from outside sources, as it affects their family. GrandFamilies of America was founded in 2006 by Pat Owens of Maryland and Sharon Olson of Minnesota. Being relative caregivers themselves, their vision is to bring the voice of the caregiver to our nation's Capitol.

The [National Kinship Alliance for Children](#) represents kinship caregivers and their supporters. The Alliance provides a state-based information/referral kinship network and a national help line, and advocates for greater support for kinship families and recognition of September as Kinship Care Month.