



KINSHIP LEGAL CUSTODY PROGRAM



The Kinship Legal Custody Program is a collaborative program between the W.W. Caruth, Jr. Child Advocacy Clinic (Clinic) and the Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program (DVAP) that seeks to provide free legal services to grandparents or other relative primary caregivers so they can gain legal custody of the kids already in their care. The Clinic is not only in charge of screening clients for the program, but also for designing and arranging the training for the licensed attorneys the attorneys who volunteer to represent clients in these child custody cases.

WHY LEGAL CUSTODY

There are a large number of children in Texas living in homes headed by grandparents or other relatives. Many of these relative caregivers are providing for these children while living in poverty, and without legal rights over the children. Having legal custody rights over the children in their care would allow these relatives to do things like enroll the kids in school, consent to medical treatment, and obtain benefits for those children.

HOW IT WORKS

Kinship caregivers needing representation to obtain legal custody for a child call the Clinic to complete a pre-screening. If the case is a good candidate for the program, then the applicant is referred to DVAP for further review. DVAP completes an eligibility assessment (including income and citizenship), a conflicts check, and finally informs the caregiver whether or not his or her case can be assigned to one of the volunteer attorneys trained by the Clinic.

FOR PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS

If you are a grandparent, relative, or other kinship care provider wanting to gain legal custody of the child or children in your care, the Kinship Legal Custody Program may be able to help you. Legal custody, known as conservatorship in Texas, is intended to be a permanent arrangement,

until the age of 18, in order to provide stability. Having legal custody of the children in your care would allow you to enroll them in school, make medical decisions for them, and apply for government benefits to help provide for their needs.

You may qualify for the program if:

- You are a grandparent, relative, or other kinship caregiver
- The child lives with you in your home and have done so for the time required by the law
- The child's parents are unable to provide the necessary care
- You are not able to afford to hire an attorney on your own and meet federally mandated income guidelines.

If you are interested in gaining permanent legal custody and would like to see if the Kinship Custody Program can help you get an attorney to do that, please contact the Clinic at 214-768-2562 on any weekday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to see if you may qualify. When you call, mention the "Kinship Program."