

Kansas

February 2, 2004

Chairman Morrison
Chairman Health and Human Services

Good afternoon Chairman Morrison and Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Ernest Kutzley and I am the Director of Advocacy for AARP Kansas. AARP Kansas represents the views of our more than 350,000 members in the state of Kansas. Thank you for this opportunity to express our support and comments for HB 2562.

Grandparents play an increasingly important role in family well being. The number of grandparents and other relatives raising grandchildren has increased rapidly over the past decade. During that 10-year period there was an increase of 43.4 percent or an additional 8,781 children living with grandparents bringing the year 2000 total to 29,026. Kansas ranks #16 in the states when ranked by the percentage increase from 1990 to 2000 for children living in grandparent-headed households. Almost half of the grandparents providing day-to-day care for their grandchildren have done so for three years or more. This is not a temporary situation, but rather creates a stable family structure.

Grandparent caregivers face a myriad of challenges in nearly all aspects of their lives when they assume the role of parent. They are prone to psychological and emotional strain as well as feelings of helplessness and isolation. Many grandparents raising grandchildren face financial difficulties, too. In fact, researchers have reported that grandparent caregivers often neglect their own physical and emotional health because they give priority to the needs of their grandchildren. Often the grandchildren in their care have unmet physical, emotional, and developmental needs that require special assistance.

One area that is of particular concern to older people who are raising their grandchildren is the legal authority they may have as grandparents. Many grandparents have partial or total responsibility for the care of the grandchildren but none of the legal authority necessary to give that care. For example, grandparents raising grandchildren in Kansas do not have the legal authority to enroll a grandchild in school even if he or she resides with the grandparent full time. States such as California have recognized this problem and have imbedded a caregiver's authorization in the California Family Codes (6550-6552) to allow for educational consent.

AARP believes that states should adopt legislation that provides a range of alternatives by which grandparents may obtain and exercise the legal authority to make decisions for grandchildren in their care.

Therefore, AARP supports language in HB2562 that establishes a caregiver's authorization affidavit.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Ernest Kutzley