



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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Probate Court Grants Available to Guardians of Children

For grandparents who care for children, the holiday season can be especially joyful, but it also can bring its share of financial challenges. Making ends meet for many of these families can be difficult enough without adding the need to buy the gifts, food and other special purchases that people often associate with a happy holiday.

One resource available to grandparents and other family members who step in to care for children in circumstances of parental inability or death is the Probate Court. Through Connecticut's Probate Courts, qualified guardians have access to two programs that can provide critical assistance to families as they raise their children, not only during the holidays but year-round: the Kinship Fund and the Grandparents and Relatives Respite Fund.

Court-appointed guardians may use grants from the Kinship Fund to buy items necessary for any growing child, such as school uniforms and winter coats, hats, mittens and boots. Grants may also be used for health services for a child, such as dental care, eyeglasses and hearing aids, and for enrichment services, such as tutoring and fees for summer camp, school field trips and sports and club participation. The grants are given in amounts of up to \$500 per child, with a limit of \$2,000 per family.

The Grandparents and Relatives Respite Fund provides annual grants of up to \$2,000 to relatives serving as court-appointed guardians. The guardians may use the money for housing, food, transportation and other family expenses and for education, clothing and day-care and babysitting expenses for the child.

"The funds are grounded in the principle that children whose parents are unable to care for them should be raised by another family member whenever possible," Probate Court Administrator Paul J. Knierim said. "Though perhaps small in monetary terms, the grants can be hugely important in terms of contributing to the stability of the home and helping to keep a child who may be at risk for abandonment secure, on track developmentally and ready to learn."

The kinship and respite funds are available to guardians appointed either by the Probate Court or the Superior Court and who meet income and other qualifications. During the 2013 fiscal year, the Probate Courts provided grants to 3,105 families and 4,681 children.

Knierim acknowledged the work of the relatives who help sustain families by raising children when parents die or are absent because of mental illness, substance abuse problems, disasters and other circumstances that affect their ability to care for a child. "If these selfless relatives could no longer fulfill this obligation, the state foster care system undoubtedly would see a greater influx of children at a significant cost to taxpayers," he said.

The kinship and respite programs are funded by the General Assembly. Guardians may find application forms and other information about the programs at their local Probate Court. For a list of courts, along with hours and directions, visit www.ctprobate.gov.