

SENATE HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES AND SENIOR CITIZENS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO **SENATE, No. 3207**

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 6, 2023

The Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Senate Bill No. 3207.

As amended by the committee, this bill requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF), upon petition of a caregiver to be appointed as kinship legal guardian of a child pursuant to P.L.2001, c.250 (C.3B:12A-1 et al.), to appoint a kinship guardian advocate to the caregiver to provide legal advocacy services throughout the kinship legal guardianship process.

As defined in the bill, “kinship guardian advocate” means an employee of a kinship agency, contracted with the DCF to provide support services through the kinship navigator program, who is assigned by the DCF to advocate for a caregiver petitioning the court to be appointed a kinship legal guardian and for the child with whom the caregiver has a kinship relationship.

Under the provisions of the bill, a kinship guardian advocate is to: (1) assist the caregiver in understanding the caregiver’s legal rights when petitioning the court to be appointed as a kinship legal guardian, and help the caregiver to understand and fully participate in the court process; (2) inform the caregiver about the caregiver’s role in the court process and regularly provide updates to the caregiver as the petition for kinship legal guardianship progresses through the court; (3) provide the caregiver with advice on how to advance the well-being of the child with whom the caregiver has a kinship relationship and represent the child’s best interests before the court when the caregiver petitions the court to be appointed the child’s kinship legal guardian; (4) inform the caregiver and the child with whom the caregiver has a kinship relationship of the child’s legal rights when the caregiver petitions the court to be appointed as the child’s kinship legal guardian; (5) inform the caregiver and the child with whom the caregiver has a kinship relationship of the caregiver’s and the child’s rights to legal counsel and representation in actions concerning child abuse and neglect and actions to terminate parental rights, if appropriate; (6)

provide the caregiver with referrals for legal assistance providers, as necessary; and (7) provide additional support services to the caregiver and the child including, but not limited to, referrals to the DCF's kinship navigator program.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amendments make various technical changes concerning grammar and syntax.