



For more information:
Barbara Graves-Poller, Esq.
212-417-3724 / bgravespoller@mfy.org
Sara Baez, Esq.
212-417-3792 / sbaez@mfy.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Higher Education Virtually Closed to Children Raised by Kin

New Report Reveals How Financial Aid System Keeps Low-Income Students Raised by Relatives Out of College

NEW YORK, June 17, 2014—Thousands of low-income students who are being raised by grandparents and other relatives outside of the foster care system are being shut out of two- and four-year higher education programs because financial aid applications do not take them into account.

A new report released by MFY Legal Services describes the hurdles that kinship caregivers face in accessing support for the children in their care and reveals serious flaws in the Free Application for Financial Aid (FAFSA), the process that determines eligibility for college financial assistance. **Long-term Consequences of Kinship Care: Overcoming Obstacles to Higher Education Funding** reveals how children abandoned by their parents and raised by relatives are stymied in their efforts to get aid readily available to other low-income children.

“FAFSA is geared to traditional families. It requires Social Security numbers and extensive financial information about parents. Few children in kinship care have contact with parents and many have never known them. The process of getting around this requirement is too convoluted for most families to navigate,” said Barbara Graves-Poller, supervisor of MFY’s Kinship Caregiver Law Project.

The report shows that the problems caregivers face in accessing college financial aid are rooted in erroneous or incomplete information and guidance given to them years earlier by family court personnel and caseworkers with the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS).

“ACS caseworkers fail to explain all the options to caregivers, and court personnel generally tell caregivers to seek legal custody instead of legal guardianship. No one in the court or child welfare system seems to care about the long-term consequences for children of their advice,” said Graves-Poller.

The report recommends practical steps that the courts, child welfare system, Department of Education and CUNY/SUNY system can take to remedy this discriminatory system. The full report is available online at <http://www.mfy.org/wp-content/uploads/FAFSA-white-paper.pdf>.

New York City Public Advocate Leticia James said: “Kinship caregivers living in poverty are often misinformed about the legal benefits provided to best meet the needs of the children in their care. Consequently, children are missing out on opportunities to access higher education and break the cycle of poverty. We applaud MFY’s Kinship Caregiver Law Project for highlighting the changes that need to be made to the system. Better standards and policies will ensure that our children have access to the means for advancing in education and overall welfare.”

MFY Legal Services has provided free civil legal services to low-income New Yorkers for 51 years. Its Kinship Caregiver Law Project provides legal assistance that helps stabilize families and keep children out of the foster care system.

###

MFY Legal Services, Inc.

299 Broadway

New York, NY 10007

212-417-3700

Fax: 212-417-3890

General Press inquiries: Dolores Schaefer, 212-417-3731, dschaefer@mfy.org

www.mfy.org