



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assemblywoman Shelley Mayer Host Housing Speak-Out For Grandparents and Other Kinship Caregivers

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS November 21, 2016

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Yonkers, NY - Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assemblywoman Shelley Mayer joined the Family Service Society of Yonkers, Family Ties, grandparents, and other caregivers throughout Yonkers for a Housing Speak-Out at the Yonkers Riverfront Library on Friday.

This program provided grandparents and other relatives raising children a forum in which to share their challenges and experiences finding affordable housing for themselves and their children. The initial discussion was spurred by a 2015 study conducted by the Urban Institute and the Center for Human Services Research at SUNY Albany which explored the quality and cost of housing options for grandparents and other relative caregivers of children younger than 18 years old.

At the urging of Assemblymember Mayer and Senator Stewart-Cousins, based largely on the testimony of Yonkers residents, the 2014-2015 New York State Budget allocated specific funds to undertake this statewide study so the Legislature could adequately respond to the housing needs of family caregivers.

Lauren Polvere, PhD., the scientist from the Center for Human Services Research University at Albany who served as the study's Principal Investigator, provided an overview of the report's findings. The study ultimately concluded that 43 percent of grandfamilies struggle to pay for housing and that many caregivers face difficulties finding spacious affordable housing that accommodates the needs of both children and elderly guardians. The grandparents and other elderly caregivers in attendance echoed these concerns as they spoke about their experiences and concerns in the discussion that ensued thereafter.

Senator Stewart-Cousins and Assemblywoman Shelley Mayer discussed possible avenues by which these issues could be addressed via policy, advocacy, and funding. They commended the precedent set in the 2016-2017 New York State Budget, which provided \$2,238,750 to support kinship caregiver services, representing an increase of \$900,000 over last year's budget. They also stressed the importance of addressing issues like overcrowding and noted the importance of funding for programs like New York State's Kinship Navigator information and referral network, for which the State provided \$320,500 in funding for this year. They also acknowledged the serious challenges of limited affordable housing in

Westchester County, and limitations in the Section 8 program that severely inhibit housing for the unique needs of these families.

Assemblywoman Mayer said, “New York State owes each of these caregivers their gratitude and admiration. They have stepped in to raise their grandchildren and relatives and provide them the loving families every child needs. Yet we have not made a similar commitment of resources and housing options that recognize their special needs. Hearing their voices will help us continue our advocacy on their behalf, and we will work towards finding policy solutions that help us meet their needs.”

“The responsibility you as grandparents and caregivers bear is enormous,” said Senator Stewart-Cousins, “but the power of family love is transformative, and the role you play in the lives of your children is enormously important. We came here today to listen to your concerns so we can fight for the housing and resources you need and deserve.”