

# Family Ties

## As Census Bureau finds increase in number of grandparents as caregivers, Massachusetts representative pushes for compensation

By Rich Thomaselli



It's no secret that many families rely on relatives — read: grandparents — for help with the kids.

Now, on the heels of a U.S. Census Bureau report that grandparents make up 30 percent of the caregivers for the 11.3 million children younger than five whose mothers are employed, a Massachusetts state representative is pushing through a bill that would provide a stipend for grandparents who raise their children's children.

Rep. John Lepper (R-Attleboro, Mass.) has been trying since 1994 to compensate grandparents who serve as de facto parents, however modest the compensation might be. (Lepper proposed a daily stipend of \$17 or \$18, similar to what foster parents receive in Massachusetts.)

The state Senate February 28 finally passed Lepper's bill to create a commission to study the issue; the bill now moves to the House Ways and Means Committee.

"It never went anywhere because it is assumed that it would be really expensive," Lepper told Massachusetts' *The Sun Chronicle*. . . . "The main objective is to try to have a coordinative agency for existing grandparents-raising-grandchildren associations across the commonwealth. They will have an opportunity to have a focal point and tell the commission what their concerns are."

A 2002 University of Massachusetts study found that grandparents — including Lepper — were

raising about two percent of children in the state. For the past 18 years, Lepper and his wife, Joan, have been the guardians of their grandchildren, Erinn and Emily, both now in college.

On the same day Lepper's bill passed the state Senate, the U.S. Census Bureau released data that showed nearly half of the country's 19 million preschool children received child care from relatives.

The study, entitled *Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2005*, showed that among the 11.3 million children younger than five whose mothers were employed, 30 percent were cared for on a regular basis by a grandparent during their mother's working hours. A slightly greater percentage spent time in an organized-care facility, such as a day-care center, nursery, or preschool. Meanwhile, 25 percent received care from their fathers, three percent from siblings, and eight percent from other relatives when mothers were at work.

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***BAYSTATE PASSES GRANDPARENTS BILL***

# Bay State Passes Grandparents Bill

State will form new commission to study issue of grandparents raising grandchildren

By Rich Thomaselli

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**AGA** American Grandparents Association



For 14 years, Massachusetts state Rep. John Lepper (R-Attleboro) has tried to get the commonwealth to create a commission that would study issues involving grandparents, specifically those who raise their grandchildren.

After all, Lepper had a vested interest: For the past 19 years, he and his wife, Joan, have been the guardians of two of their grandchildren, Erinn, now 22, and Emily, now 20.

"My efforts on this came out of my own personal experience," Lepper told Grandparents.com in a phone interview. "I was just trying to advance the cause of grandparents who were in the situation I found myself in."

Mission accomplished.

After proposing a commission when he joined the state legislature in 1994, Lepper's tireless

efforts paid off — first in February, when the Massachusetts Senate passed his bill and then on July 1. The two legislative bodies approved a larger child-abuse and neglect bill. Lepper's Grandparents Commission is part of the broader bill.

"I've always known, from traveling around the state, that there's a hell of a lot of [grandparents] doing the job of raising their grandkids," said Lepper.

Lepper said the Grandparents Commission will consist of 11 members, each appointed to two-year terms. Besides studying issues related to grandparents raising their grandchildren, the commission will coordinate the efforts of various grandparent-support groups across the state. The commission will also advise the state legislature on matters concerning grandparents, and on the effects any pending legislation would have on grandparents. Commission members will not draw a salary.

Lepper has long tried to convince his political colleagues of the importance of the issue, finally gaining \$50,000 in 2002 to sponsor a study that looked at the question of how many Massachusetts grandparents were raising their grandchildren.

The study, by the University of Massachusetts, found that about two percent of children in the state were being raised by grandparents — including Lepper's family. Lepper is now 73 and his wife is 70. They took custody and guardianship of Erinn when she was 2 1/2 and Emily when she was eight months.

"Things were different in raising them from [raising] our own kids," Lepper said. "You don't have as much energy. We were in our 50s, and it took some energy. My wife had just gotten her master's in business, and we were looking forward to a second income that we never realized. So, yeah, what we were going through was very much a part of my efforts."

Ironically, Lepper is retiring at the end of his term. Asked if he will continue his efforts, "You bet," he says. "I'll do whatever I can."