

February 8, 2021

Dear Chair Williams and Members of the House Committee on Human Services,

I urge you to support HB 2387 and HB 2738. These bills will improve the lives of abused and neglected children across the state of Oregon by giving more children in foster care the benefit of a CASA volunteer.

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is an ordinary person who has an extraordinary impact for children in foster care. Studies have shown a foster child paired with a CASA is more likely to find a safe, permanent home and half as likely to reenter the child welfare system. Children paired with a CASA tend to have better futures. They perform better academically and are disciplined less often for behavioral issues.

This impact is in part because a CASA is the only person in a child's life who is solely focused on their best interest during their time in foster care. An Oregon child usually has one volunteer CASA for the entire length of the case – even when there are multiple caseworkers, attorneys, teachers, and foster parents involved.

Our courts rely on CASA volunteers. Judges rely on their unique perspective because volunteers have the time to really get to know a child and can report the important details of what makes that child unique. This is especially important now as caseworkers are carrying high caseloads and families are struggling under incredible stress.

Oregon state statute mandates of a CASA for every child in state care. (ORS 419B.112) Local CASA programs simply lack the funding to meet this goal. CASA structures leverage state funds into a force-multiplier. Each paid staff can support about 30 unpaid volunteers who, in turn, can advocate for as many as 75 children. Last year CASA volunteers at in Central Oregon provided more than 7,100 hours of service to children in foster care. Oregon. At the Independent Sector's estimated volunteer rate of \$27.20 per hour, this equates to \$193,120.00 in services provided by CASA volunteers.

In 2020, CASA of Central Oregon served 85% of children in foster care with a CASA in Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson counties. Sustainable funding for local CASA programs is vital to serve more children. These house bills will improve recruitment, training, supervision, and support volunteers to provide a CASA for every foster child in Oregon. This requires a robust effort to include a larger and more diverse group of new CASAs.

Sincerely,



Heather Dion
Executive Director
CASA of Central Oregon

casaofcentraloregon.org