



LANE COUNTY

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My name is Danielle Ward, and I am a supervisor at CASA of Lane County. I supervise up to 38 CASA volunteers. I live and work in Springfield. I am also a CASA volunteer myself. A Court Appointed Special Advocate, or CASA, is a volunteer who has been sworn in and appointed by a Judge to be an unbiased voice for abused or neglected children while they are in foster care. Without important funding, the work that we do will be directly diminished. We are mandated to have one CASA per child, but this is an unfunded mandate. We are asking for the funding to remain the same, continuing to include CASA in the State budget. We are asking for \$6.4 million to fund the next 24 months of court appointed advocacy for some of the most at-risk children in the state.

I got into this line of work, like so many of us do, because of my own childhood. I experienced violence and powerlessness first hand. Being a CASA is about giving some of the power lost, back to the child. It is about making sure that their needs, basic and more, are met. Children have a need to be seen and heard and CASA gives them that voice. Children with a CASA are more likely to get the services that they need because they have someone looking out for them as they and their families maneuver through the Court system.

As a CASA myself, I have two cases of my own. One with a medically fragile youth who was removed from their mother's care due to neglect, and another for a youth who was both abused and neglected. In both of these cases I advocate for the best interest of the child. We spend our time in the home making sure the child is fed, clothed, has a bed to sleep in at night and a caring, safe family to live with. Sometimes being an advocate is as seemingly simple as teaching a parent how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for their child in the morning before school. Little changes can make a big difference. We see the child wherever they are, whether that is in a foster home, trial reunification with their parents or in therapeutic residential facilities. We communicate with doctors, nurses, teachers and counselors to make sure the child is getting the best care possible and when something is not right, we raise our voice as a party to the case to ensure the child is heard. In order to continue to operate as we do now, we need the same funding to continue. We ask for the \$6.4 million to fund court appointed special advocacy for Oregon's children who are the most in need for the next 24 months.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Danielle Ward
CASA of Lane County