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To the Oregon State Legislature Joint Ways and Means Committee,

As a CASA volunteer with more than eight years of experience, I join with CASAs around the state of Oregon in urging you to support this vitally important organization. CASA is 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.

In my years as a Court Appointed Special Advocate in Douglas County, I have been assigned to 20 cases, serving a total of 33 children. I've had an up-close view of the number of children in our county who are suffering from neglect and abuse and who need the support of an additional advocate in order to keep their child welfare case on track and moving toward a safe and stable home environment.

One such case is a youth I have served for just over seven years. "Joe" came into foster care at age nine and is now about to turn 17. He has been shuffled through 18 different placements (foster homes and treatment programs) and is still waiting for skilled foster parents or family members who can work with his behavioral health needs and provide a loving home for him. As Joe has been placed far away from Douglas County for several years and I am not able to visit him in person on a monthly basis, I wondered if Joe would be just as happy not to have a CASA anymore. Joe let me know unequivocally that he wants me to continue as his CASA, saying "You're the only one who has been with me since the beginning. You're the only one who hasn't given up on me." With so many changes in placements, caregivers, caseworkers, attorneys, etc., I as his CASA have been the one constant in his life, and that is deeply important to him.

Having a CASA matters to children, like Joe, in the foster care system. The CASA program in Douglas County needs better funding in order to develop and maintain a robust program. We are currently serving only a fraction of the children in foster care. Our goal is to serve every child who has an open case with child welfare.

Please consider CASA's request for \$6.4 million so that all of Oregon's foster children can have the advocacy they deserve and so desperately need.

Sincerely,

Susan Ferguson

I am for the child™

Our mission is to provide children who have been abused or neglected and are now in foster care, with qualified, compassionate advocates who will fight for and protect children's fundamental right to be safe, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to learn and grow in the safe embrace of a loving family.