

Submitter: Kari Pinard
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3196

CASA Programs play a critical role in the lives of children who have suffered abuse and neglect. When the child enters the Dependency/Child Welfare System, multiple organizations may become involved--each playing an important role that touches a specific area of their life.

CASA is the only organization that focuses on the best interest of the child of the whole child during the length of the case. Working to ensure that the child has the services that they need to have the best chance to overcome the trauma they have endured; medical, dental, vision, mental health, psychological evaluations, education services (behavior plans, 504, IEP, attendance), disability services eligibility (when appropriate), physical, occupational, speech therapy, early intervention and other services as needed.

Besides Child Welfare, CASA is the only organization that has access to all information regarding the child. Reporting unbiased information in writing and verbally to the judges about how the child is doing, what services they need, which ones they are receiving and how they are progressing is critical to the outcome each hearing and progression of the case.

Having been involved with CASA Programs for 23 years, I have seen the important difference CASA makes for a child. Having CASA advocate for and ensure that the child's needs do not get lost during the duration of the case and ultimately makes a difference in their life, both short and long term. There are so many examples that can be shared where CASA has made a significant impact to the child. One teen who has been in care for over 8 years and has had the same CASA during the case, recently turned 18 years old. The CASA has been the only consistent person in his life. He had 37 placements, multiple caseworkers, several attorneys, and at times made poor decisions. His CASA never judged him, offered support and guidance, attended his delinquency hearings, assisted with life skills and ultimately enrolled in community college. During a hearing after turning 18 years old, the judge asked if he had anything he wanted to share with the court. He stated that he wanted to thank his CASA and how he had always been there for him. He went on to say his CASA is the closest thing I have ever had to a dad or a parent. Other examples of the lasting positive impact CASA including a CASA received an invitation to attend their former child's high school graduation several years after the case closed, other CASAs have been invited to birthday parties, a biological parent invited CASA to stand beside them during their child's baptism.

Funding to backfill reductions in Federal Victims and Crime Act grants is critical in supporting our work in supporting the children who are victims of abuse and neglect. It allows us to continue to recruit, train, supervise community volunteers who dedicate their time in service to their assigned child/sibling group during the length of the case. This includes, but is not limited to; attending meetings, talking with foster parents, biological parents, caseworkers, and service providers, gathering information, ensuring assessments are completed, and services are provided, writing court reports and informing the judges of concerns and making recommendations regarding the child and parents.

Thank you for your time.

Please adopt the -1 amendment that includes CASA programs and pass the bill out of committee.