

Submitter: Candy Humphreys
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3196

Court Appointed Special Advocates volunteers are on the front lines in the fight for child and youth mental health and physical safety, it is absolutely critical that CASA programs be able to reconnect to critical VOCA funding. I am asking the House Committee to pass House Bill 3196 to allocate funds to the Oregon Department of Justice to backfill reduction on federal VOCA funds and adopt the forthcoming amendment that would add additional money for Court Appointed Special Advocate programs.

Research shows children with a Court Appointed Special Advocate access more trauma-informed services like mental health counseling, tend to perform better academically and behaviorally, have significantly fewer foster placements, and are half as likely to re-enter the foster care system than children without a CASA. It is absolutely critical that we fund CASA programs because CASA volunteers are on the front lines in the fight for child and youth mental health and physical safety, including preventing addiction and homelessness.

Frontier CASA provides advocates in Gilliam & Wheeler counties. Every dollar this program gets is used to the fullest extent to provide exceptionally trained volunteers to speak on behalf of the best interest of children and help them remain with their family of origin when possible and if conditions are safe. We know separation causes trauma and believe families should receive the resources they need to be reunited and stay together. This includes having children live with relatives and be placed with siblings together. We advocate for connecting families with services and support that will help them achieve stability. Frontier CASA, and all CASA programs in Oregon commit to integrating diverse viewpoints to achieve effective and inspiring solutions. CASA programs are part of the larger system in advocating to protect children. We work with other entities who also rely on VOCA funding like the Oregon Child Advocacy Centers and our county VOCA programs. At Frontier CASA, we are members of each county's Multidisciplinary Team(MDT) Sexual Abuse Response Team(SART), We collaborate with each other, the National and State CASA organizations, local programs, individuals in the child welfare and judicial systems, families, educators, resource parents, and other stakeholders in efforts to result in fewer children coming into, or remaining in, the child welfare system. We want to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive, be safe from neglect and abuse by having the funds to use all the tools, trained advocates, resources, and data to improve outcomes for these children and families.

Please pass House Bill 3196 and the upcoming Amendment supporting CASA. If you want to know more about our work at CASA, please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you for taking the time to read these comments.