



CASA OF COOS AND CURRY COUNTIES
OREGON COAST COMMUNITY ACTION

Dear House Committee on Judiciary,

I am writing to you to ask for your support for HB 3196 and to adopt the amendment that includes CASA programs and pass this bill out of committee.

I have been with the CASA program in Coos and Curry Counties for over 14 years. I began my CASA journey as a volunteer, then was hired by CASA to do family search and engagement for our kids in care. Eventually I took a position as a volunteer supervisor, which was my favorite position with CASA as I got to work with our wonderful CASA volunteers daily. In December of 2015 I became the director of our program.

I speak from the perspective of a rural CASA program director. A few years ago we were privileged to have access to VOCA funding for our programs. This was a blessing as the pool of dollars was great enough that it reduced our staff time in writing grants and fundraising; we had more time to commit to volunteer recruitment and engagement and ensuring our volunteers had the knowledge and resources to advocate for the best interests of our children in foster care. Large grants are hard to find in rural communities. After the loss of VOCA funds I found myself managing 15-20 small grants to make up our budget. Further, with increased pressure from other nonprofit organizations, lulls in the market, and other contributing factors, the local funds available have become less and less. Having larger pools of funding gives our program staff more time to increase our volunteer pool and serve more children.

Our program, including myself, has 5 full time and one half time staff and 45 volunteers, we cover Coos and Curry Counties. One of our full-time staff members works under contract for ODHS in doing intensive relative search for our kids in care.

As a nonprofit we do understand the power of stories and I'd like to share a few from different perspectives.

A quick quote: A young lady who was in foster care in Coos County a few years ago stopped by our office in early 2024 to introduce us to her baby. During a conversation she stated, "My CASA was the person who fought the hardest for me and she was the only person who wasn't

getting paid to fight.” We loved getting to see her as an adult and that she wanted to show us how successful she had become and that she was a good mom!

From CASAs:

CASA has helped me to understand how children feel when there is conflict or aggressive behaviors in their home, I’ve also learned how to talk one on one with the kids and get them to feel comfortable with me and know I am a safe person who is there to help and protect them and advocate for them. – **CASA Sharon**

The second case that came to me was a young boy in resource care. His behavior was extreme, many needs unknown. Parents were struggling with addiction and being unhoused. To be honest I was worried that the family was so deeply fractured it would be difficult to safely help them back to one another.

Mom was hesitant to work with me until I was able to show her that my goal was what was best for her son. I was able to help attain services for the child. These services helped to equip him for public school, and he was able to begin mental health services. Next, I was able to connect mom with housing help, therapy. Food programs, Head Start, ESD, Transitional housing and more.

When mom was able to reunite, we moved her child into transitional housing with her. Many programs came together. She was gifted with furniture, bikes, etc... within a year she moved into their first home. A HUD housing complex, she became employed full time, Reinstated her driver's license. All while attending therapies for both of them. I remember her beginning the work of learning to pay bills first monthly. Skills she had not practiced before.

From completing applications. To attending pediatrician visits... I became a safe adult who mom and child could ask questions and lean on. Even when mom had hard questions, she didn't want to ask DHS, Case workers or therapists. I could direct her somewhere. She said I was her local encyclopedia. The case has closed. I continue regular contact with this family. They look forward to my check in and have become close to my heart.

Seeing so much success in a case where I was unsure it was possible has changed my views. I now see so much more possibilities. Not just in my CASA cases. I see it when I attend community housing meetings. I see it when I work with other volunteer groups.

This family is happily succeeding. He is blooming in a kinder class. We took him during the summer to integrate him and explain his needs. He is happy, building skills and having so many less behaviors are emerging.

How did this impact me. I will always have a place for this family in my world. Mom will have a trusting respect for CASA workers. She will ask instead of hiding. The child is safe, happy, loved

and with his mom. The work of CASA cannot be measured. My heart bursts each time I see this family. They are succeeding with just a hand up from us.

CASA Works. – **CASA Anna**

From our Resource Parents:

“Our CASA worker has been a valuable resource for our foster child. I have always been thankful when the child placed in our home has a CASA. Everything goes smoother with a CASA. In this instance, our foster child was a baby. I felt like the CASA watched over him, so he did not get lost in the fray and that she was his voice. She watched over the process from his point of view and truly was HIS advocate. It is a beautiful thing, when a child in "the system" has an advocate who truly cares for his best interest. We have been foster parents for 13 years and have ONLY had good experiences with CASA. What a great program, full of caring, wonderful people. Thank you for blessing the lives of so many children in Coos and Curry County.”

“Our CASA has been an absolutely essential advocate for the children in our care. Without her, many things that they needed may not have happened. We are so blessed and grateful that they have a CASA!”

“A group of loving, caring people who go above and beyond. Always looking out for the best interest of the children.”

“They are all AWESOME! When I stop being a foster parent, I will become a CASA.”

“I believe that CASA does an absolutely amazing job of supporting our resource parents in any way that they possibly can, and such a valuable and appreciated asset to the community.”

“This program has been a huge help for us. Our case is in another county but the support we have received from them has been tremendous!”

Our CASA, “was absolutely imperative to our understanding of and ability to provide a positive placement for our last foster teen.”

Thank you for your support of our CASA programs statewide. We are a very strong network of CASA programs serving all communities in Oregon. Our work makes changes and improves the wellbeing of children in foster care and often their families. Our work helps reduce the often long-term affects of abuse, neglect, and trauma our children experience. What we need from you, as a partner to our work, is increased funding opportunities so we can focus more of our efforts on advocacy and making a difference. Please support HB 3196 and adopt the amendment that includes CASA programs and pass this bill out of committee.

Sincerely,



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