

Submitter: Sarah Shipley  
On Behalf Of: Yamhill County CASA  
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3196

I became a CASA 17 years ago because I wanted to help our most vulnerable citizens (children) grow and succeed. In my 17 years I have worked more than 10 cases (some unfortunately repeats, served more than 11 children, done a stint as Executive Director of our local program, and continued to serve children both as a member of the board and as an active volunteer currently with 3 cases, all teens, two of whom are developmentally delayed. With the right interventions, these youth can thrive and many will grow to serve in other ways that help youth. While not every case has the outcome I hoped for, all have left the youth better off than before. Youth are impressed by finding that someone who is NOT paid to be there is there to support them. My volunteer hours average 40+ per month in these last few years. These youth are unbelievably isolated when compared to the youth most of us see in our lives. They deserve better.

Over the course of my service, I have seen how the work of CASAs and their partners have served to improve the overall safety net and quality of life for these youth. CASAs are a critical piece of the equation because a CASA serves the Best Interest of the Child. This is something that judicial ethics prevent the youth's attorney from doing in many instances as, if the youth can communicate to their attorney, regardless of age, a desired outcome, the youth's attorney must fight for this even if it is returning the youth to an abusive, dangerous environment. Attorneys and ODHS caseworkers have huge caseloads (better than they used to be but still overwhelming) and a CASA with usually only 1 case, has the time to study the case in depth. I have been privileged to work with some of the best caseworkers and the CASA, the child's attorney, and the caseworker can be a powerful team for pushing successful outcomes for youth. One of the toughest things to learn is that children don't have explicit rights -- the state has an obligation to protect them, but they are truly in a vulnerable legal position and it seems to important that they have a powerful advocate voice. We work closely with other nonprofits working for youth and to help their families succeed. Partners like Juliette's House, Oregon Child Advocacy Centers, Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.

I personally have seen CASAs fight against incredible odds for the youth they serve; one CASA worked very hard to get two siblings adopted together and the adoption blew up - she then got them in family counseling programs and connected with other organizations who found them the right family. Another has worked across state lines to see siblings who came into care at different times all end up with the same adoptive family in another state. I've seen teen boys with threatened juvenile problems, thrive on the belief and support of their CASA and join work and school programs to get them back on track.

So many of the funds that serve children are funneled through Federal Govt programs to the states and now, with federal funds for non-profits being threatened as a cost-cutting measure, we need to secure some of these funds CASA programs rely on for our state. We are a lean organization with 3.5 FT staff to provide the legal interface for about 50 volunteers that must be trained and supported each of whom volunteers an average of 10 hours per month over a 2 year period.

I humbly and passionately ask that you support the future of Oregon by helping us maintain these critical programs and adopting the -1 amendment to this bill that includes CASA programs and pass the bill out of committee.