

Submitter: Naomi Rund  
On Behalf Of: CASA of Corvallis  
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3196

I became a CASA who helps children who have experienced trauma and abuse because of my own past experiences. I want to do all I can to help protect these children from any further harm or neglect. I want to stand by these children, especially at times when they're terrified (such as court trials), and remind them that there is someone out there who cares only for them. That someone cares about them with no ulterior motive and only wants to support them and see them succeed. Working at CASA helps me to do that, and care for all these children who have been abused and neglected by family members.

Without funding, the children that we serve would not have someone solely on their side. The lawyers assigned to their parents will always advocate for the child to be returned to the parent, even when there are still drugs and drug use happening in the home. The lawyers assigned to the children will advocate for whatever the child desires, even when it is not in their best interest. ODHS is so understaffed that their point of view on all cases is 'close as soon as possible'. CASA stands up for what is in the child's best interests exclusively, and is able to do so because of the VOCA funding we receive since we're all solely nonprofits.

All of the children we work with have experience abuse and neglect, and many were exposed to drugs while their mothers were pregnant with them. These children struggle in school, struggle with their emotions, and in extreme cases, struggle with daily life. We work with these kids to help them where we can. They're usually assigned to therapy once in care and we regularly check-in with their therapists to see how they're doing, if they're improving or if they're getting worse. We tutor our kids who need extra help with school subjects, and have an education specialist who is their voice in the school system. If they need an IEP or 504 plan, our education specialist helps these kids get the support they require to succeed in school. We would not be able to do this without the support of VOCA funding.

We already have a small staff, and without additional VOCA funding, our staff would have to be reduced even further. This hampers our ability to serve local communities, which hurts us all. All of us at CASA want to continue to support these kids and their foster families, and we are unable to do that without additional funding. We support these kids in their therapy, their education, their home lives, their resources, their access to clothes, school supplies, and sanitary supplies, their access to toys and quilts, and everything else they wouldn't have without direct CASA involvement. While these children are usually put in good homes in the foster system, many homes have multiple children, and are unable to give a child everything they want.

CASA's involvement helps those families who can't afford to buy more clothes and new pairs of shoes, and supplies those directly to the children. We are able to do all of this because of the support of the VOCA funding. We run our own donation center and staff help out at a moment's notice whenever we have a new kid come into care who has absolutely nothing. We support these children with everything that we have, and we are able to do this because of the support from funding like VOCA.

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