

Submitter: Christine Cunningham
On Behalf Of: CASA Lane County
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Public Safety
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5014

April 16, 2025

Dear Co-chairs, and members of the committee,

My name is Christine Cunningham, and I have been a resident of Lane County, Oregon for 52 years. I am writing as a volunteer for CASA Lane County to pledge my support for HB5014 and to highlight another important bill, HB 3196. Support for both bills will ensure the safety and wellbeing of Oregon's most vulnerable children.

The Oregon CASA Network is operating in a crisis mode now as a result of losing \$1.7 million in federal funding on March 14, 2025. This reduction follows the elimination of funding from the Victims of Crime Act funding a few years ago—decreases despite the fact that the (Oregon) CASA program is a mandated service under ORS chapter 419B.

CASAs are court appointed volunteers who serve as “the eyes and ears of the court” for children and youth in foster care and those at-risk children living with their parents at home under a supervised safety plan. So far, I've had 13 cases involving 21 children, all of whom have experienced significant degrees of abuse or neglect.

Six years ago, I became a CASA Peer Coach, an innovative role in our CASA Lane County organization. PCs are paired with new CASA volunteers when they begin their first cases. In this role, I've provided case oversight to nine CASA volunteers who have served 20 children—in addition to carrying my own cases. I value the fact that the Peer Coach model allows us to serve more children on the wait list.

My cases have become increasingly difficult as more children have been removed from their homes as a result of the Fentanyl crisis, and as more parents have fewer opportunities to access recovery programs and psychological care due to a lack of funding for mental health therapy and a lack of practitioners.

The good news is that children who are paired with CASAs are half as likely to re-enter the child welfare system.

CASA of Lane County equips each of us with comprehensive, multi-day training before we are assigned a case. And each year, we refresh our training with 12 hours

of continuing education on brain development, substance disorders, psychotropic medications, sex abuse, neurodiverse challenges, and much more—while receiving knowledgeable and caring support from paid CASA staff.

Further reductions in funding would mean that CASA can no longer ensure the 30:1 volunteer to supervisor ratio and more importantly, would be forced to decrease services for the vulnerable children and youth who need your support, guidance and advocacy.

In my 15 years of volunteerism with CASA Lane County, I continue to believe in the value and effectiveness of our service. Please show us with your financial support, that you do too.

Thank you,

Christine A. Cunningham

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