

October 16, 2022

Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight

By Caitlyn Eakin, State Director, Kansas CASA Association

Dear Committee Chair, Representative Concannon, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the mission and impact of the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in Kansas. Please see the video attached:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlkOpaMb23M&t=11s>

The Kansas CASA Association's primary mission is to enhance the success of our 21 local program members across the state so that they can best advocate for children in need of care. CASA volunteers speak exclusively for the child's best interests and are only assigned to one or two cases at a time. The CASA volunteer has the time to explore the history of each assigned case thoroughly. The volunteer talks with the child, parents, family members, school officials, doctors, therapists, and others involved in the child's life who may have specific facts about the case. The volunteer also reviews all records and documents pertaining to the child. He or she submits a written report to the court with detailed information and recommendations covering the child's safety, well-being, and permanency. The CASA volunteer provides continuity by staying on a child's case until it is permanently resolved and the child is placed in a safe, loving home. For many children who experience abuse and neglect, their CASA volunteer will be the one consistent positive role model in their lives.

As of Calendar Year Quarter Three, reports from programs we show that they have served over 1,200 children in foster care with a CASA. CASA programs in Kansas have had approximately 14,500 advocacy contacts with the children, caseworker, parents, or other impact stakeholders, and submitted approximately 600 court reports since we began tracking this data in Calendar Year Quarter Two (July 2022). We also experiencing a 99% success rate in CASA Assignment sustainability as of the 2022 Third Quarter Report. These outcomes are a direct representation of the impact work CASA does for the children and families in this state that need us the most.

Unfortunately, we live in a world where there will always be good and evil. At CASA we understand our advocacy will always be needed, even if it is to a few children. Kansas CASA and our programs around the state know the importance of following due diligence to prevent an unnecessary separation of a child from their biological family. We are also aware that there are many unfortunate circumstances where there is no other option, and for the safety and benefit of the child, they need to be placed in state custody. It is in these situations that a CASA is most needed, the core intention of CASA's creation by Judge Soukup: *Where all other measures have been taken and now the child(s) needs someone to advocate for their soul best interests.* We must not overlook these circumstances or it will be of great detriment to the child and the Kansas welfare system. It is with this sentiment in mind that Kansas CASA asks for continued financial support by all member of this committee. It is with great sadness we inform

Kansas CASA's mission is to enhance the success of existing and developing Kansas Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs with sustainable resources, training, partnerships, and funding.

the committee that our financial situation at the state level and within our local programs is becoming very volatile. As previously mentioned, we understand the great importance of family first and prevention, but it would be unfortunate not to pay heed to the children whose best interest is removal. CASA's primary mission is to make sure these children are not overlooked by judges, DCF, Legislators, or funders.

Please remember us and our impact for the most at-risk children in this upcoming Legislative Session when we make an increased financial ask.

Attached: funding breakdown of CASA for Local Programs and the Kansas CASA Association.