

Kansas House Committee
Children and Seniors
State Capitol
Topeka, Ks 66612

February 19, 2020

Good afternoon Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Kansas (Court Appointed Special Advocate) CASA Association and our twenty-three local programs, thank you for the opportunity to share some of our achievements and concerns. I would like to take a moment to introduce myself and my colleagues who have joined me here today. My name is Vanessa Dudley-Miller. I assumed the role of State Director for Kansas CASA Association about six weeks ago. I bring 23 years of experience serving various populations related to intellectual disabilities, mental health, and research and I am currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Kansas Medical Center working on my dissertation.

Judge Rebecca Crotty joins us today with over 38 years of experience in family, civil, litigation, and tax law. Serving as a magistrate judge in Garden City she handled all child in need of care (CINC) cases. She has recently retired from the District Court in Shawnee County and has been on the Kansas CASA State Board since 2016.

Jamie Dempewolf has over 15 years of experience in child development, mental health, and with individuals with exceptionalities. She is the Executive Director for CASA of Shawnee County and can answer questions on the program's operational tasks.

Since our establishment in 1991, it has been the mission of the Kansas CASA Association to support our local programs as they recruit, train, and maintain court-appointed volunteers for children who experience abuse and neglect so they can thrive in safe, permanent homes.

In 2019, Kansas CASA provided services for more than 2,000 children in need of care. Of the children CASA serves less than 2% were reported to experience recurrence of abuse or neglect. This low rate can be attributed to the services provided by CASA including but not limited to the individualized support the children in need of care receive from our volunteers. Our volunteers act as the information gatherers, facilitators, advocates, and monitors for the children we serve. More specifically, the volunteer visits with the child in various settings, educates the child on the court process, provides the judge with objective information and recommendations, and follows-up with the child's case worker in the event the child is missing mental health services, medical services, or other needed care for the duration of the child's out of home placement.

CASA saved the state of Kansas over 1.3 million dollars in 2019 based upon the value of the CASA volunteers' time alone. In addition, the return investment of CASA's services continues well beyond the child's time in foster care. Researchers suggest the overall quality of life of a person who experiences

foster care is improved when they experience a positive relationship as a child. For many children, that positive relationship is with their CASA volunteer.

In 2018, a 15 year-old girl placed in a group home ran from her placement. She was on the run for approximately seven months. During that time, her CASA volunteer was able to maintain contact with her through Snapchat. There were times she was as far away as Texas. The volunteer continued to encourage her to come home, as he feared for her safety. The child finally came back, and the volunteer continues to advocate for her.

Kansas CASA programs provide services for thousands of children in need of care; however, we are only able to provide services for approximately 28% of children in need of care each year due to ongoing funding issues. There is a need for growth and development within our current CASA programs as well as a need to develop CASA services in the 17 rural counties currently without certified CASA services in order to reach the other approximate 72% of children in need.

However, before we can focus on this much needed growth and development, our attention is diverted to a more immediate funding issue. Kansas CASA programs are no longer eligible to receive the \$200,000 from the Kansas Children's Cabinet. This funding cut was confirmed with the Children's Cabinet last week and will take effect July 1, 2020. This funding cut is projected to reduce each Kansas CASA urban program budget by up to \$24,000 and to reduce each Kansas CASA rural programs' budget by up to thirteen percent.

The Report of the Child Welfare System Task Force to the 2019 Kansas Legislature recommended, "The Legislature shall fund Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to ensure the availability of CASA volunteers in all jurisdictions, without disrupting the current funding CASAs receive from the State of Kansas". We are asking the State of Kansas to take these recommendations into consideration and provide Kansas CASA Association and the CASA programs with sustained financial funding.

We would be grateful for any support and guidance you can provide.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

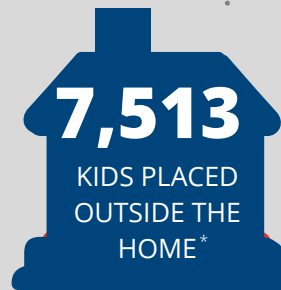
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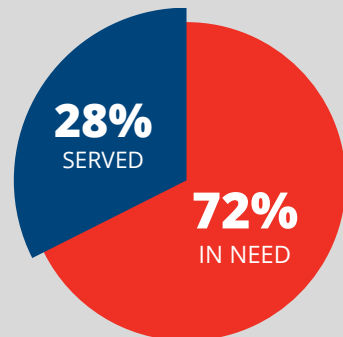
2019 Kansas CASA Statistics



Personal visits, phone calls, emails, meetings with teachers, family interviews, case planning, court appearances...all take TIME!



Children in foster care can be placed anywhere in the state. Volunteers go the distance to advocate for their CASA child!



Last year, 7,513 children in Kansas were removed from their homes. CASA Volunteers were only able to serve 28%. Additional volunteers are needed to increase the number of children served in Kansas.