



ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

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Support Illinois Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) through HB 2497 (Chief Sponsor Rep. Latoya Greenwood D-East St. Louis & Rep. Sam Yingling D-Round Lake Beach). This legislation will amend the Criminal and Traffic Assessment Act and address an error in HB 4594 (Rep. Steven Anderson R-Geneva) from the 100th General Assembly by allowing fees and fines for minor traffic violations to be collected and distributed to a Court Appointed Special Advocates Fund for the purposes of activities and services by Counties that have a Court Appointed Special Advocates Program within that County.

Illinois Children Need Protection and Care:

We respectfully urge you to support the Illinois Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program in FY 2020. This program is critical to the more than 4,100 abused or neglected children who deserve to have a trained and deeply dedicated CASA advocate appointed on their behalf, and to the over 12,000 child victims who are still waiting for the presence of a consistent, caring adult to speak for their best interests in the courtroom and in the community. This funding is critical to improving outcomes for every abused and neglected child.

The 31 county-based CASA programs provide specially trained and supervised citizen-advocates to assure that the needs and rights of our most vulnerable victims are met. Judges appoint CASA advocates to their most difficult and complex cases, because the individual dedicates sustained, long-term attention to the child's needs. In addition to providing direct services to child victims, CASA program funds are used to ensure that every child receives the highest possible quality of services and care, through training, program standards, technical assistance, and resources that utilize evidence-based and trauma-informed practices.

CASA changes outcomes for DCFS Involved Youth:

Children who languish in the foster care system without a safe and permanent home face many challenges to success. Abused and neglected children often experience several layers of trauma and face multiple risk factors including juvenile and adult delinquency, homelessness, substance abuse, mental health issues, teen pregnancy, and lower academic achievement. More than 2,500 CASA advocates across Illinois seek to change the trajectory of these children's lives, in part with the support of HB 2497.

Evidence-Based Outcomes:

- Safety: Less than 1% of children assigned a CASA re-entered protective care in 2018. There were no child deaths when a CASA was appointed.
- Permanency: Children assigned a CASA have shorter lengths of time in protective care. 39% of children assigned a CASA left the foster care system vs. DCFS's case closure rate of 25%.
- Well-Being: CASA volunteers are trained to advocate in court for the educational needs and physical and mental health needs of children. Our volunteers are the one consistent, caring adult connection throughout a child's time in protective care. The CASA advocate adds a level of accountability and support to all those involved, including DCFS Caseworkers, in a child's time in foster care.