

Washington State Judicial Branch 2015-2017 BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST

Decision Package

Agency	Administrative Office of the Courts
Decision Package Title	CASA Restoration and State CASA Funding
Budget Period	2015-2017 Biennial Budget
Budget Level	Policy Level

Agency Recommendation Summary Text

Funding is requested to increase state funding of local Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs and to secure funding for Washington State CASA for the promotion, support, and development of CASA programs in Washington State.

Fiscal Detail

Operating Expenditures	FY 2016	FY 2017	Total
001-1 General Fund State	\$ 696,000	\$ 696,000	\$ 1,392,000
Staffing	FY 2016	FY 2017	Total
FTEs (number of staff requested)	0	0	0

Package Description

(1) Court Appointed Special Advocates are volunteers who advocate for abused and neglected children in dependency court as volunteer guardians ad litem. State funds are requested to increase the number of volunteers available to local CASA programs in Washington State. (\$621,000 per FY)

(2) The request includes state funds to pass through the AOC to support activities provided to CASA programs by State CASA, a non-profit organization. This funding will target training, networking, and technical assistance to assist local CASA programs develop capacity to advocate for abused and neglected children. Funding would support training activities and on-site technical assistance to CASA programs throughout Washington State. (\$75,000 per FY)

Background and Need:

State and federal laws mandate the appointment of a guardian ad litem (GAL) for all abused and neglected children in dependency cases. In 35 counties and three tribal courts, CASA volunteers serve as volunteer guardians ad litem to represent the best interest of these children. Combined, these programs supervise over 2,000 CASA volunteers annually who provide advocacy to over 6,000 children (over half of all children in dependency). CASA programs in Washington are a blend of court-based, nonprofit and tribal court programs, which are funded by a combination of county, state and private sources.

Statewide, only about half of the 10,000 children in the dependency system at any given time have a CASA volunteer to represent their best interests. Local CASA programs are stretched beyond capacity in their efforts to comply with the law. Currently, in densely populated areas (King, Snohomish, Pierce, Kitsap, Clark, Spokane, Yakima, Benton/Franklin), only about half the children in dependency are represented with a CASA volunteer. The other half typically are represented by a staff GAL with a case load exceeding 75 children. In rural areas, programs struggle with inadequate, unstable funding and do not have sufficient staff capacity to recruit and retain volunteers while maintaining a GAL case load as well.

Local program increase:

Additional CASA volunteers are needed due to increased dependency filings in our state (4,864 in 2013), the continuation of a trend that began in 2010. The National CASA best practice standard is 1 volunteer supervisor to 30 volunteers who can supervise up to 90 children. Because of increased dependency filings, and to ensure that no child was without a voice in court, many CASA programs resort to assigning staff directly to these cases. This leads to a decreasing ability for those programs to recruit and retain volunteers. Funding is needed to increase local program capacity to recruit, train and retain additional CASA volunteers to provide these children the high quality advocacy efforts they deserve to ensure safe and permanent homes.

There are volunteers in every community waiting to represent children in dependency. Programs lack staff and resources to recruit, train and supervise volunteers. The request for state funding will build the capacity of CASA programs to increase the number of children represented and ensure high quality volunteer representation.

Washington State's Justice in Jeopardy Report and the Court Improvement Plan both address representation of children by a guardian ad litem (GAL). GAL representation of children is a high priority for increased state funding because it is mandated by statute. In addition, to ensure access to justice, representation of children's best interests has become increasingly important since many jurisdictions have implemented increased funding for parent representation.

Training, networking, and technical assistance increase:

Washington State CASA is a non-profit organization that coordinates two annual CASA program manager's seminars. Traditionally, these have been held in the spring and fall. State CASA also maintains working knowledge of CASA program practice around the state. State CASA is responsible for establishing and providing resources to programs such as a manager's listserv, compliance with National CASA best practice standards, maintaining state compliance of the CASA core training curriculum, functioning as a help desk for programmatic issues and serving as a general communications hub amongst CASA programs statewide.

Washington State CASA works with local programs to provide on-site technical assistance, including strategic planning, volunteer recruitment and retention support, and training of local staff on the use of the National CASA volunteer core training curriculum.

As a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, State CASA is able to pursue a wide variety of funding streams to support local program capacity and sustainable efforts and to reduce the program's sole reliance on state and county government sources. State CASA currently administers a federal IV-E training reimbursement contract, project specific grants from a variety of sources to increase volunteer recruitment, retention and training, and actively encourages individual contributions from donors to support state and local advocacy efforts for children.

Washington State CASA hosts an annual conference for CASA volunteers, staff, lawyers and more who will have the opportunity to engage with each other and learn from experts in the child welfare field to better inform their child advocacy practice. Unlike other conferences, this conference is designed for CASA volunteers and attracts speakers from around the state to present on ways CASA advocates can ensure better outcomes for the children.

Narrative Justification and Impact Statement

This package contributes to the Judicial Branch Principle Policy Objectives identified below.

Fair and Effective Administration of Justice in All Civil and Criminal Cases.

Washington courts will openly, fairly, efficiently and effectively administer justice in all criminal and civil cases, consistent with constitutional mandates and the judiciary's duty to maintain the highest level of public trust and confidence in the courts.

Currently, only half of the dependent children statewide are represented by a CASA volunteer. Some courts are not currently able to comply with the statutory mandate to appoint a GAL, due to the limited capacity of CASA programs to recruit, train, supervise and support CASA volunteers as a result of funding cuts in both state and county funding.

Accessibility. *Washington courts, court facilities and court systems will be open and accessible to all participants regardless of cultural, linguistic, ability-based or other characteristics that serve as access barriers.*

Children of color are disproportionately represented in the dependency system. One opportunity associated with additional CASA funding is the ability to focus recruiting a more diverse pool of volunteers that is consistent with the diversity of children in each jurisdiction. Programs are interested in recruiting volunteers who, for example, speak Spanish, are knowledgeable in specific cultural customs and norms and who represent the many diverse communities of Washington.

Access to Necessary Representation. *Constitutional and statutory guarantees of the right to counsel shall be effectively implemented. Litigants with important interest at stake in civil judicial proceedings should have meaningful access to counsel.*

The dependency system is focused on the determining what is in the best interests of the child. As an officer of the court, CASA volunteers act as fact-finders for the judges, providing them with information that they may never get otherwise, advocating for the child's best interest along the way. CASA volunteers gather information from court documents, social workers' files, and educational, medical and therapy records. They also speak with the child, family members, school officials, health providers, and other professionals involved in the child's life. CASA

volunteers use this information, as well as firsthand observations, to advocate for the child in court, at school, and in other aspects of their lives. The CASA's role is to consider what is in the child's best interest and to make sure that each child's individual needs are met and convey that message to the court.

CASA volunteers are specially trained and appointed by a judge to serve as a volunteer guardian ad litem (GAL) for an abused or neglected child. They are committed to determining and speaking for that child's best interests throughout the process. The volunteer is an official part of the judicial proceeding, working alongside attorneys and social workers as an appointed officer of the court. CASA volunteers ensure that the decisions being made on behalf of children they advocate for are timely, appropriate, in compliance with federal and state laws and in the best interests of the child. CASA volunteers investigate a child's history, facilitate communication between concerned adults, advocate for services and appropriate placement, and ultimately make recommendations to the judge - in that child's best interest.

Commitment to Effective Court Management. *Washington courts will employ and maintain systems and practices that enhance effective court management.*

Judges rely on trained CASA volunteers who bring an independent voice into the courtroom. They are the judge's 'eyes and ears' and are crucial in helping the court to make sound decisions about a child's future.

State CASA contributes to effective court management by supporting programs, their staff and volunteers throughout Washington. State CASA leverages opportunities and secures resources on a regional and statewide level so that local programs can maximize their direct support to abused and neglected children through training of staff and volunteers, opportunities to share best practices in child advocacy and by providing technical assistance such as compliance with National CASA best practice standards and CASA program specific data collection and analyses in conjunction with statewide child advocacy partners, local court administration and public and private investors in the child welfare system.

Appropriate Staffing and Support. *Washington courts will be appropriately staffed and effectively managed, and court personnel, court managers and court systems will be effectively supported.*

The mission of this proposal is focused on the delivery of high quality and effective child advocacy through the use of trained and adequately supported community volunteers. In order to successfully accomplish this goal and to therefore affect positive outcomes for children, additional resources are needed to recruit, train and supervise additional volunteers.

Measure Detail

Impact on clients and services

Increasing the number of advocates will produce improved outcomes for abused and neglected children in dependency court cases.

Impact on other state services

Increased CASA funding will positively affect the quality of child representation statewide. Several studies, including a national report by the U.S. Department of Justice, validate

outcomes with CASA volunteers in comparison to the general foster care population which have residual benefits to the state.

A child with a CASA volunteer is:

- More likely to achieve permanence
- Half as likely to re-enter foster care
- Substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care
- More likely to have a plan for permanency, especially children of color
- More likely to do better in school (pass all courses, less likely to have poor conduct in school, and less likely to be expelled)
- More likely to have a positive attitude towards the future, an ability to work with others and to resolve conflicts
- Likely to score better on nine protective factors

Relationship to Capital Budget

None

Required changes to existing Court Rule, Court Order, RCW, WAC, contract, or plan

None

Alternatives explored

CASA programs have been assigning children directly to staff as a measure of last resort. This is an un-sustainable model, for as more children are assigned to staff directly, overall program capacity to recruit, train and supervise volunteers is diminished, thus resulting in lower quality advocacy for all children assigned to the program.

State CASA is engaged in a continual process of development and renewal. Several statewide partners have provided input on alternative suggestions and solutions to provide support for local CASA programs achieving their goals of serving CASA volunteers.

Distinction between one-time and ongoing costs and budget impacts in future biennia

The proposed budget level will continue for future biennia. Programs will continue to assess future needs based on future dependency filings and the needs of local courts.

Effects of non-funding

CASA programs struggle to provide volunteers to all cases to which the program is assigned. Current active CASA volunteers will not have the level of support and supervision needed to ensure retention. Staff with high case loads of volunteers, who often carry dependency cases themselves, will continue to have excessive workloads and be unable to engage in adequate recruitment and support activities. In addition, high caseloads contribute to high staff turnover, which impacts the stability and quality of the program. Insufficient funding puts dependent children at risk and presents liability issues for the State's dependency system.

The effects of non-funding would continue the slow and steady degradation of State CASA's network and inefficient redundancy throughout the network. CASA programs have come to expect training and technical assistance provided by State CASA and use the training provided

by State CASA as a means of augmenting local efforts in volunteer recruitment, training and retention.

Expenditure calculations and assumptions and FTE assumptions

This statewide funding proposal for local CASA program staff the National CASA best practices standards and would restore funding that was appropriated during the 2007-2009 biennium funding.

State CASA currently employs one full-time executive director dedicated to carrying out the mission of the organization and overseen by the Washington State CASA Board of Directors.

Training expenses include lodging, meals, program travel, and State CASA staff preparation / coordination time and speaker reimbursement. On-site Technical Assistance includes staff time and travel expenses.

Funding sought under this proposal will be spent in the following categories:

Two-day Spring Program Managers Training.....\$15,000
 Fall Program Manager's Training.....\$7,000
 Annual Conference.....\$45,000
 Onsite Technical Assistance.....\$8,000
 Total Request:\$75,000

Object Detail	FY 2016	FY 2017	Total
Staff Costs	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Non-Staff Costs	\$ 696,000	\$ 696,000	\$1,392,000
Total Objects	\$ 696,000	\$ 696,000	\$1,392,000