



Testimony in Support of Raised Bill No. 347
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Esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee - Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in **SUPPORT of Raised Bill No. 347** "An Act Establishing a Program for Court Appointed Special Advocates in Certain Juvenile Court Matters."

- **Bill No. 347 is NO COST to state budget.** Funds needed will be fundraised in the community.

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Child Advocates of SW Connecticut is a non-profit that recruits, trains and supervises court appointed volunteer advocates who work to ensure that each abused or neglected child has a safe, loving and permanent home.

Child Advocates of SW Connecticut is a member of the national CASA organization.

As Executive Director of Child Advocates of SW Connecticut, I have seen the impact a volunteer advocate can have on the life of an abused or neglected child:

"Being in foster care is living in a constant state of flux. Homes, schools, families...everything is always changing, often suddenly without warning. The only constant was my volunteer advocate. Without her, I would have been lost in the system." Melissa, Former Foster Youth

WHAT:

- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are trained volunteers who help abused or neglected children find safe, permanent homes, and help them develop the tools they need to thrive and ultimately succeed in life.
- CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to watch over and advocate for abused and neglected children, to make sure they don't get lost in the overburdened child protection system.
- CASA volunteers stay with each case until it is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home.
- For many abused children, their CASA volunteer will be the one constant adult presence in their lives.
- CASAs stand up for the rights of abused or neglected children in the courtroom and the community.
- CASAs change lives

WHY:

- Last year over 8,000 Connecticut children were victims of maltreatment
- There are over 4,000 Connecticut children in foster care
- In 2013, almost 1,800 children entered foster care

- In 2013, over 1,600 children in foster care had more than two placements
- The average child will spend nearly two years in foster care and will change homes over three times
- Foster youth repeat a grade in school twice as often as their peers
- Foster youth are 5 to 10 times more likely to enter the juvenile justice system, and 25% are incarcerated within the first two years of emancipation
- Only 1.8% of foster youth will go on to complete a bachelor's degree, compared to 24% among the general population
- Over 22% of youth leaving foster care at age 18 experience homelessness
- Over 25% of foster alumni are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, which is nearly double the rate of U.S. war veterans

***Nationally, over 35% of children in child protection are provided a volunteer advocate
But in Connecticut, only 5% of children in child protection are provided a volunteer advocate***

HOW:

CASA volunteers are facilitators who help families and social workers get things done for vulnerable children.

CASA volunteers speak directly with the child, parents, foster parents, attorneys, social workers, school officials, and others involved in the child's life and advocate for each child's individual needs.

CASA volunteers submit concise written reports to the court. Information they gather is shared with and utilized by the court to help make crucial decisions about the child's placement and future.

Typically each CASA volunteer is assigned not more than two cases. This allows CASA volunteers to dedicate sufficient time and energy to fully explore the circumstances of each assigned child in a variety of ways.

CASA volunteers send the message to vulnerable children that people in the local community care about them and want to help.

IMPACT:

Last year, more than 77,000 volunteer advocates nationwide helped 234,000 abused and neglected children find safe, permanent homes.

A child with a volunteer advocate is more likely to find a safe, permanent home

- *More likely to be adopted (8, 9, 10, 11, 14)*
- *Half as likely to re-enter foster care (8, 11, 14)*
- *Substantially less likely to spend time in long-term foster care (14)*
- *More likely to have a plan for permanency, especially children of color (17)*

Children with a volunteer advocate get more help while in the system...

- *More services are ordered for the children (1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14)*

... and are more likely to have a consistent, responsible adult presence. (1, 2, 12)

- *Volunteers spend significantly more time with the child than a paid guardian ad litem. (2)*

A child with a volunteer advocate spends less time in foster care... (15, 16)

- *"It is quite remarkable that children without CASA involvement are spending an average of over eight months longer in care, compared to children having CASA involvement." (15)*

... and are less likely to be bounced home to home. (13, 15, 16)

- *Volunteer advocates improve representation of children. (18)*
- *Reduce the time needed by lawyers (12)*
- *More likely than paid lawyers to file written reports (3, 4, 5)*
- *For each of 9 duties, judges rated volunteer advocates more highly than attorneys (12)*
- *Highly effective in having their recommendations adopted by the court (1)*

Children with volunteer advocates do better in school... (13)

- *More likely to pass all courses*
- *Less likely to have poor conduct in school*
- *Less likely to be expelled*

... and score better on nine protective factors (13)

- *Neighborhood resources*
- *interested adults*
- *sense of acceptance*
- *controls against deviant behavior*
- *models of conventional behavior*
- *positive attitude towards the future*
- *valuing achievement*
- *ability to work with others*
- *ability to work out conflicts.*

Programs and policies that target children and youth at the greatest risk of long-term disadvantage, provide benefits not only to individual children, but also to the larger society, in terms of a better educated populace, stronger families, and safer communities.

Support:

Anna Quindlen
Author and Columnist

"The lawyers know the statutes, the social workers the regulations. But the CASA volunteer is assigned to know the child, one child at a time, to understand the boundaries of her life, to telephone her teachers, to consider her hopes and dreams, to try to come to some conclusion about what will be in her best interests. For children whose pasts have been chaotic and whose futures are uncertain, the CASA volunteer may be the most consistent, interested presence in their lives."

Marian Wright Edelman

Founder and President, Children's Defense Fund

"Keeping children safe must be everybody's business. CASA volunteers play a unique role on behalf of some of our most vulnerable children. Their commitment, vigilance and persistence offer hope where there has been little. They help to light the way for these children—and for all of us."

U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa)

"There's always a need for volunteers so every child in foster care can have a special advocate in his or her corner."

The Honorable Robert Brutinel

Presiding Judge, Yavapai County Superior Court

"The one constant I see in children's lives is the CASA. They are the ones that receive the graduation announcements. They are the ones still called upon to be mentors for children as they continue to grow and become adults. I thank them for all the things they have taught me about being a better judge and about being a better human being."

Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care: "CASA is a proven means of strengthening the voice of children in dependency courts."

American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law: "CASA is an effective way that private citizens can respond to our nation's child protection emergency."

Chief Justices and State Court Administrators: "The Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators recognize and commend the efforts and contributions of the CASA volunteers in assisting children before the court."

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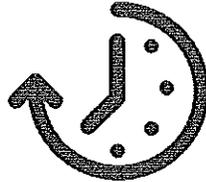
COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES CHANGE LIVES

"Being in foster care is living in a constant state of flux. Homes, schools, families...everything is always changing, often suddenly and without warning. The only constant was my CASA volunteer. Without her I would have been lost in the system." **MELISSA, FORMER FOSTER YOUTH**

THE PROBLEM: OVERWHELMED SYSTEMS



will find themselves in U.S. foster care this year.



The average child will spend nearly 2 years (20 months) in foster care



On average each one of those children will change homes three times

THE SOLUTION: CITIZEN VOLUNTEERS

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), trained volunteers who help abused and neglected children find safe, permanent homes.



A WISE INVESTMENT
One year of CASA/GAL advocacy costs less than one month of foster care.



1 staff member



supports 30 volunteers



75 children

THE RESULTS: BRIGHTER FUTURES



CASA PROGRAMS CHANGE LIVES
A child with a CASA/GAL volunteer is more likely to find a safe, permanent home.



A child with a CASA/GAL volunteer is half as likely to re-enter the foster-care system



And, they are more likely to succeed in school and less likely to spend three or more years in care.

OUR VISION: SERVING EVERY CHILD



76,000 CASA/GAL volunteers help change children's lives every day.



251,000 abused and neglected children served through CASA or GAL programs in the last year.



400,000 children are waiting for a volunteer empowered to find them a safe, loving, permanent home

"CASA is an organization of people with a proven record of service, excellence, high standards, determination and an unwavering commitment to abused and neglected children and to advocating for justice for all children." **JUDGE JOYCE WILLIAMS WARREN**

The National CASA Association is an organization of 949 programs recruiting, training and supporting court-appointed volunteers to stand up for the rights of abused and neglected children, in the courtroom and the community.

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NATIONAL CASA ASSOCIATION | 800-628-3233 | CASAFORCHILDREN.ORG

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