

Court Appointed Special Advocates

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Issue

Describe the new court appointed special advocates (CASA) program in Connecticut's juvenile courts.

Summary

By law, the Judicial Department must, within available resources, establish a court appointed special advocate (CASA) program to provide free assistance in neglect, abuse, custody, guardianship, or family with service needs proceedings in juvenile court. The chief court administrator within the Superior Court for juvenile matters must administer the program.

A party may ask the court to appoint a CASA, or the court may do so on its own motion. CASAs have qualified immunity when acting in good faith and within the scope of their appointment ([PA 16-210](#)).

CASA - Defined

A CASA is a volunteer recruited, screened, trained, and supervised by a local CASA program affiliated with the National Court Appointed Special Advocates Association ([NCASAA](#)) (CGS § 46b-129c(a)).

CASA Program

Scope of Services

Under the program, a CASA may serve as a resource to the court in determining and furthering the best interests of a child (under age 18). A CASA (1) may conduct an independent investigation of the facts associated with the filing of a petition; (2) must undertake and facilitate activities to further the child's best interests, including making recommendations to the court; and (3) may, in appropriate cases as determined by the court, undertake activities in the child's best interests until the child reaches age 21 (CGS § 46b-129c(b)(2)).

CASAs are not allowed to replace or interfere with a child's counsel or guardian ad litem (GAL). By law, a GAL is someone, not necessarily an attorney, that the court appoints during certain proceedings to gather information and report on what he or she believes is in a person's best interest. GALs must undergo training before being appointed. The training runs for more than three full days in juvenile court and focuses on child protection. GALs are required to complete six hours of continuing education each year.

Proceeding and Access to Records

A party may ask the court to appoint a CASA, or the court may do so on its own motion. Upon appointment by the court and after obtaining any required releases to access records, a CASA must have access to (1) any party to the juvenile court proceeding and (2) all relevant information or records, such as school, child care, medical, mental health, and court records and records maintained by the Department of Children and Families (CGS § 46b-129c(b)(2)) .

Criminal History Record and Child Abuse and Neglect Registry Checks

NCASAA or any affiliated Connecticut program, before accepting anyone to serve as a CASA, must require the person undergo a (1) state and national criminal history record check and (2) state child abuse and neglect registry check.

The Judicial Department may not accept, into its CASA program, anyone who refuses to consent to or cooperate in the processing of the required records and registry checks (CGS § 46b-129c(c)).

Immunity from Civil and Criminal Liability

CASAs who act in good faith and within the scope of the court's appointment have qualified, rather than total, immunity for their actions. They may only be civilly or criminally liable if their acts or omissions constitute intentional, willful, or wanton misconduct. The same is true for program staff affiliated with NCASAA who act within the scope of their employment (CGS § 46b-129c(d)).

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