

Dear Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee Members,

I am Mike Tikkanen, a CASA community volunteer GAL from 1996 to 2008, Founding and current CASAMN board member and Founder and president of KARA, Kids At Risk Action. Prior to my work as a CASA, I've owned and operated several MN businesses.

The outcome of this year's budget earmark request by CASAMN President Gerard Bodell will help save a program that has provided in person guardian ad litem State Ward child advocacy through many thousands of hours of qualified, concerned community GAL volunteers (about 10,000 citizens) over 40 years.

I understand the Program's efficiency argument for minimizing or eliminating the CASA program through attrition.

Staff are easier to manage and take more cases. The **metrics employed today** may show a more efficient system because of this. I draw attention to the fact that there are no metrics for child outcomes in the system.

GAL staff members with large caseloads (up to 30 families) do not have the time for in person visits. Phone calls and online interviews are the rule.

Repeatedly I've experienced that volunteers are appreciated by the children and are the only community eyes on the system.

The COVID lockdown has kept children from being seen by teachers and other mandated reporters for long periods.

Fewer children have been reported to CPS and those children interviewed via internet and phone with the perpetrator in the home were not served well. More trauma and greater trauma will pass through MN institutions in the years to come because of this.

When four-year-old Eric Dean died ten years ago after years of horrific visible abuse and 15 reports by mandated reporters – the child was never seen by CPS or GAL.

The recent Safe Passage Investigation of Child Maltreatment Deaths shows that many of the deaths that occurred might have been prevented had they been seen by CASA GAL (pages 19-32).

In person meetings (CASA National requires this) with caseload children is elemental in achieving better understanding of the circumstances and outcomes for the children unfortunate enough to become wards of the State.

All State Ward children in my caseload had horrid things happen to them. Most of them suffered for years before they became State Wards. One of the reasons for my strong feelings for keeping CASAs is that they are appreciated by the kids in the system and many judges.

It was Chief Justice Kathleen Blatz that stated a few years ago that 90% of the youth in Juvenile Justice have come through Child Protective Services (CPS). I would offer that a substantial percentage of teen and preteen pregnancies have also passed through CPS.

In the future, I hope for outcomes-based metrics for all of CPS and the GAL program to demonstrate how the system is working for the children it serves.

In the world of Child Protection, less is not more.

