



**February 4, 2023**

**To: Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee**

**Dear Chair Becker-Finn, Vice Chair Frazier, Minority Leader Scott, and Committee Members,**

As part of your review and approval of the state's Guardian ad Litem (GAL) budget, I would like to respectfully provide the following testimony.

Minnesota has a hybrid GAL model which blends volunteer and paid GALs together under state supervision. The volunteer model for delivering GAL services is utilized nationally across 49 states plus the District of Columbia. There are over 950 nonprofit CASA organizations screening, training, and supporting over 97,000 volunteers. The volunteer model is the predominant, proven national model that works when volunteers are screened, trained, and supervised properly. Volunteers provide the means to include and leverage community resources, provide transparency in the child protection system, and build trust in the judicial system. Legislators, attorneys, judges, justices, and the public all support the utilization of volunteer GAL.

CASA Minnesota is supportive of allocating more resources, not fewer, for children in need of child protective services. We support the current hybrid model which utilizes both volunteers and employees. However, we ask that you consider receiving more outcome-based information, hold more hearings, and request more data so that you hold all of us working in the child protection system accountable. The current \$46 million GAL budget request does not include critical outcomes-based information and is not fully transparent with data related to outcomes. The only "Quality" measurement offered is for "Court Reports Filed On-Time". While this is an important operational metric, there are most certainly more important measurements available and needed related to outcomes and the purpose of the GAL role.

I strongly support the following list of desired outcomes taken directly from the state's GAL budget package and request that you consider requesting more data around each outcome:

**GAL are appointed to ensure:**

- Children are safe
- Concurrent permanency planning with relative/kin begins on Day 1
- Children spend the least amount of time under court jurisdiction
- Children receive appropriate services including trauma informed care

- Parents participate in services that reflect the best interests of children
- Physical and mental health, educational and cultural needs of children are met
- Children are reunited with parents if it is in the best interests of the child
- Children do not re-enter the child protection system

Additionally, I request that you discuss and understand what amount in this budget could be allocated to sustaining and supporting a strong and diverse **volunteer** GAL program.

Finally, I want to stress again that the current GAL budget request does not include critical outcomes-based information and is not fully transparent with data related to outcomes. Please consider an on-going budget funding process for both the state and volunteer GAL program, which includes measurements and accountability for outcomes. You all are in a powerful position to improve the Guardian ad Litem program in the state of Minnesota, and I thank you for your service.

Sincerely,

*Gerard Bodell*

Gerard Bodell  
Volunteer Guardian ad Litem 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District and Board President CASA Minnesota