

Todd M. Fellman
District Court Judge

Hennepin County Juvenile Justice
Center
590 Park Avenue
Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55415



State of Minnesota
Judicial District

Serving the County of:
Hennepin

Telephone: 612-348-6000
Law Clerk: 612-322-6481

Chairpersons and members of the Judiciary/Public Safety Conference Committee:

The Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program staff and volunteers serve an incredibly vital role in the Minnesota child protection system—independently representing the best interests of children in court proceedings, ensuring their voices are heard, and helping guide the court process towards safety, stability, and permanency. In fact, the role of the GAL is so important to the system that Minn. Stat. § 260C.163 requires that the court to appoint a GAL in every CHIPS case to protect the interests of the children.

However, GAL program is currently facing several issues affecting their statutory mandate:

The GAL program is experiencing alarmingly high turnover rates resulting in children without assigned GAL's. Trained and experienced staff are leaving for more competitive and less emotionally taxing jobs. Additionally, the program is struggling to recruit qualified replacements and volunteers (who need training, technology support, and supervision).

The above-mentioned turnover and unassigned cases are unfortunately concentrated in the largest district in the state, Hennepin County, where currently 135 cases are unassigned with 246 individual children without a statutorily mandated GAL. The delay in assigning a GAL is a delay in advocating for that child's safety, permanency, and wellbeing. The delay is not sustainable nor acceptable for the most vulnerable children in Minnesota.

Every day that a child goes without an assigned GAL is a day they lack a trusted, independent, trained individual advocating for their best interests in court. It is a day longer they may spend in uncertainty or an unsafe environment, which not only undermines the integrity of our child protection system but places additional burdens on the courts, social services, families, and communities.

The decisions you make now will have lasting impacts on the lives of Minnesota's most vulnerable children. Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Judge Todd M. Fellman
Hennepin County District Court
Todd.Fellman@courts.state.mn.us
Cell: 763-350-7300