



The mission of Safe Passage for Children is to strengthen the Minnesota child welfare system so children are safe and reach their full potential.

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and Members of the Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee:

My name is Rich Gehrman and I am the Executive Director of Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota.

Our organization is very concerned about the decision by the state Guardian ad litem program to end CASA through attrition. Your support of this budget request would likely prompt a reconsideration of this decision.

We do not understand why Minnesota has decided to end the CASA program while 49 other states plus the District of Columbia support CASA volunteers.

I have appeared before the Guardian Life ad litem board to express these concerns as well. The presentation I witnessed was largely about the costs of supervising CASA volunteers. I think Mr. Bodell has addressed those effectively.

I have many years of experience supervising state and county human services budgets and what is missing in my view is an analysis of the benefits. As often happens, the picture changes significantly when these are considered.

CASA volunteers bring many benefits to Minnesota. They raise public awareness about the importance of child protection and foster care, and of the resources that social workers need to do their job. Guardians are focused solely on advocating for the child which in our experience is often an important perspective. CASA provides an additional avenue for diversifying the team that interacts with families and children in child protection.

Another benefit is provided by Mr. Bodell himself. He has been a top level private sector executive and brings that experience to the table, which includes expertise in developing standards and metrics to improve the program.

Our organization has had many volunteers who were also CASA volunteers and we found them to be dedicated advocates and highly knowledgeable about the system.

We encourage you to approve this appropriation as a step towards ensuring that CASA continues for another forty years.