

UTAH OFFICE OF GUARDIAN AD LITEM & CASA

Executive Offices and Criminal Justice Appropriations Subcommittee

February 13, 2013

Funding Request Presentation

The Office of Guardian ad Litem provides specially trained attorneys to represent children who are the subject of abuse and neglect allegations or findings by the courts to be victims of abuse and neglect. In addition, the Office utilizes Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers to assist in gathering child welfare case information and to assist GALs with child-clients; and also provides training and certification of Private Attorney GALs (PGALs) to be appointed in district court cases. The GAL Oversight Committee provides policy direction for the Office Director.

I. Facts/Issues:

a. Approximately 89% of the Office's budget goes to personnel:

- 37 FTE GALs, 1 FTE Appellate GAL, 2 FTE Admin. GALs (Dir/Dep. Dir)
- 6 FTE CASA Coordinators, 1 FTE CASA Administrator
- 25 FTE Support Staff (1.5 GAL to 1.0 Staff)
- 13 offices

b. Nationally recognized standards for average client-loads are *no more than 100 child-clients per GAL*. Actual and projected client-loads are as follows:

	<u>Overall (37 GALs)</u>	<u>Juvenile Court</u>	<u>District Court</u>
Feb. 1, 2012:	7,558 (204/GAL)	5,346 (178/GAL)	2,212 (287/SLGAL)
Feb. 1, 2013:	6,692 (180/GAL)	5,495 (183/GAL)	1,217 (139/SLGAL)
Jul. 1, 2013:	5,500 (148/GAL)	5,500 (148/GAL)	0000 [2012 HB357]
Jul. 1, 2013:	6,977 (188/GAL)	5,500 (183/GAL)	1,500 [2013 SB49S1]

c. GAL turnover rate is steady at 20-25%. GALs are paid on average 34% less than other areas of state government, including government attorneys working on the very same cases as the GALs. Starting salaries are at \$51,000, and overall average salaries are currently at \$60,000, with no predictable opportunity for periodic step-raises. *Turnover negatively impacts child-clients, depletes the experience pool, and makes it difficult to hire experienced/skilled attorneys.*

d. One CASA Coordinator can handle about 100 advocates at a time (training/case-assignments), resulting in the consistent, **one-on-one assistance for about 250 child-clients at a time**. The Office could use 2000 more advocates. Without CASA Coordinators, volunteer advocate numbers simply plateau at current levels. Last year CASA advocates donated 28,786 hours, which represents over 90% return on state dollar investment.

II. Accomplishments (See *Annual Report 2012*):

- a. A **188% increase** in volunteer CASA Advocates to over 520.
- b. Over 70% of the GALs are *Certified Child Welfare Law Specialists*.
- c. Implementation of a new **automated case-management system called “VOICE”**, which interfaces with the courts and other agencies. The system is capable to do E-filing and will interface with the court’s overall system as it progresses.
- d. **CASAs are now “educational advocates”**. Foster-care children are twice as likely to need special or intensive educational services. The Office puts more focus on educational advocacy through CASA advocates. Early intervention decreases the need for more intensive services later-on and helps to avoid academic failure. CASA educational-advocacy increases academic performance, social competence, and better outcomes for foster-care children.
- e. Implementation of a new, user friendly, **on-line Private Attorney Guardian ad Litem Application and Training program**, makes it easier and takes less time for Utah attorneys to become certified and eligible to serve as a PGAL. There has been a 30% increase in PGALs since December 2012.

III. 2014 Building Block Request:

- a. \$1,300,000 Salary Parity Increases for GAL Attorneys:
High GAL turnover rate and need for parity.
- b. \$185,100 for 1 FTE GAL and 1 Support Staff needed for 8th District:
Client-load for one GAL is at 428.
- c. \$55,000 for 1 FTE CASA Coordinator:
Replaces discontinued federal grant seed-monies.

IV. Effect of 5% Budget Cut vs. Increase:

- a. A 5% budget cut would result in the loss of 3 FTE GALs, and an 8% increase of average client-loads per GAL.
- b. A 5% budget increase would add 2 FTE GALs and 2 FTE Staff, and reduce average GAL client-loads by 5%.