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April 19, 2023

Oregon State Legislature Joint Ways and Means Committee

Dear Legislators:

Thank you for considering the matter of funding Court Appointed Special Advocates for children in foster care.

We learn many things in the thorough training we receive to become CASA's. One of the most important thing is that we can *make a difference in the life of a child*. I've had just such experiences. One six-year-old looked forward to my visits and would call out to her foster mother, "CASASue is here! CASASue is here!" And we would do things like color and draw with sidewalk chalk and visit. She has been adopted by that mother.

In another case, the children didn't seem to be all right. There was nothing obvious, but they were closed down even after getting to know me, and wouldn't say much. I reported to the caseworker, who said she was working on finding another placement for the children. We were finally sitting outside playing with bubbles when one of them opened up and said she didn't feel safe there. I talked with the caseworker again about timing, and she was able to expedite the move and get the children to another foster family. There was an immediate connection between the children and the foster parents, and the children got the love and services they needed. Those children have been adopted by those parents.

Oregon CASA's have many many stories like these, and you can make that possible.

We are asking for \$6.4 million to fund the next 24 months of court appointed advocacy for some of the most at-risk children in the state.

- Children with CASA volunteers, especially children of color, are more likely to have a plan for permanency, a key predictor of future success.
- CASA's structure leverages state funds into a force-multiplier: a volunteer rate of \$29.95 per hour, equates to more than \$6 million in CASA volunteered services.
- Oregon law mandates every child in foster care must be assigned a CASA. Without adequate funding and more volunteers, Oregon CASA Network cannot meet the mandate – leaving half of foster children without a CASA.

Please allocate this money for CASA.

Sincerely,
Sue Swift, CASA for children of Douglas County.

I am for the child™

Our mission is to provide children who have been abused or neglected and are now in foster care, with qualified, compassionate advocates who will fight for and protect children's fundamental right to be safe, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to learn and grow in the safe embrace of a loving family.