

Good morning, Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and members of the committee, my name is Cassandra Mendoza. I am the Malheur County Program Manager with CASA of Eastern Oregon. I work out of Ontario, Oregon. I greatly appreciate this effort by the committee to hear us out on important matters.

I am here today with my request that our state allot the \$6.4 million dollars to fund Oregon CASA programs so that my program, CASA of Eastern Oregon, can continue to maintain its service to children in Malheur, Baker, Grant, Harney, Lake, and Union counties. In addition to each program in the state providing nearly \$100 thousand (or more) worth of volunteer hours each year and being one of the most efficient state-mandated programs, I also have some personal reflections to share as to why I believe in the value of CASA.

Our local programs, like many across the state, are overburdened with children in foster care. I am the program manager for Malheur County, and we serve an average of 200 children at any given time. With additional funding we would have the ability to engage in more community events, conduct outreach, and make sure that every child in care had an advocate. We are a volunteer based organization and with the rising cost of everything it is important for us to provide volunteers with gas cards, supplies, and educational opportunities. Recruitment and raising awareness are so important with the number of children we have in care. At this moment, Malheur County has 2 part time staff managing over 170 kids and 13 volunteers. The impact we are having on each individual child that we serve is priceless.

Please allow us to continue our essential service to children and families. Thank you for your time today.

Cassandra Mendoza, Malheur County Program Manager, CASA of Eastern Oregon