



Serving Baker, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, and Union Counties

Good morning, Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and members of the committee,

My name is Wendy Simer, and I am staff as well as a volunteer advocate with CASA of Eastern Oregon. I live in Summerville. 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 Baker, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, 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.

The children we serve are the most vulnerable population in our state with the least amount of life supports. Children who suffer adverse experiences without proper interventions are more like to engage in substance use and criminal activities. A 2015 study indicated the average annual cost per inmate in Oregon to be just over \$44,000. That's hundreds of thousands of dollars spent, not including treatment services.

As a CASA volunteer, I would rather our state invest in our children today while there is still time to acquire healthy coping skills, rather than later in life as they are facing incarceration. Children with a CASA volunteer tend to have better outcomes; they do better academically and behaviorally in school and have better overall wellbeing. We can help change the outcome for this vulnerable population with your investment dollars. Please, help us make this difference, and allow us to continue our essential service to children and families.

Thank you for your time today.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Simer".

Wendy Simer,
Coordinator and Volunteer Advocate
CASA of Eastern Oregon