



## Luther S. Olsen

State Senator  
14th District

**TO:** Assembly Committee on Family Law  
**FROM:** Senator Luther Olsen  
**DATE:** January 30, 2018  
**SUBJECT:** Testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 786

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Thank you Chairwoman Rodriguez and the Assembly Committee on Family Law for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 786.

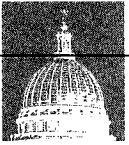
This legislation will stabilize and expand the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program. CASAs are citizen-volunteers who advocate for the best interests of a child who is placed in out-of-home care. Supervised by professionals and appointed by judges, a CASA volunteer is the "eyes and ears" of the judge outside the courtroom. A CASA is tasked with gathering information about all adults in the child's life, reviewing relevant documents, visiting and spending quality time with the child on a weekly basis. They also attend hearings, provide recommendations, partner with parents, and monitor each case until the CHIPS (Child In Need of Protective Services) order has ended.

Children who are served by a CASA often have improved outcomes in many aspects of their lives such as improved academic performance, better communication skills, shorter time in foster care, reduced likelihood of returning to foster care, fewer placement changes and improved likelihood of receiving needed services.

The CASA program is very cost-effective: one staff member supervises 30 volunteers who work with up to 45 children in their community. The current CASA network operates nine local programs serving 12 counties. The counties currently served by a local CASA program are Brown, Dane, Outagamie, Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Marinette, Sauk, La Crosse, Columbia, Monroe, Vernon and Rock.

This bill would increase the annual appropriation for CASA by \$80,000 for a total of \$250,000 per fiscal year. The increase in funds will enable expansion of existing programs, regionalization among counties and the creation of new CASA programs in high-need areas of the state. CASA of Wisconsin currently has a strategic plan for development and this proposal would give them the flexibility to determine how and where to expand.

Thank you, members. I ask for your support and would be more than happy to answer any questions.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**BETH MEYERS**

**Rep. Meyers Testimony for AB 786 in the Assembly Committee on Family Law**

Tuesday, January 30, 2018

10:00 AM

300 Northeast

Wisconsin State Capitol

Madison, WI

Representative Rodriguez and members of the committee, thank you for agreeing to hear this bill, and for giving me the opportunity to submit testimony on its behalf.

It was an honor to serve on the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care.

Assembly Bill (AB) 786 would increase the appropriation for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), from \$80,000 per fiscal year to \$250,000 per fiscal year. This new funding would be used to strengthen existing programs, expand or regionalize others, and create new programs in accordance with the CASA program's strategic plan to expand throughout Wisconsin.

CASA programs involve trained and supervised volunteers who are appointed by a judge to essentially be their eyes and ears outside of the courtroom. These appointees are citizen volunteers who advocate for the best interests of the child. A CASA is tasked with gathering information about all the adults in the child's life, reviewing relevant documents, visiting the child on a weekly basis, attending hearings, providing recommendations, partnering with parents, and monitoring the case until the CHIPS (Child In Need of Protective Services) order has ended.

The CASA program has proven to be highly effective in the 12 counties where it currently operates. Children who have a CASA volunteer spend less time in foster care and are half as likely to reenter care. It gives them another stable adult in their lives, as the weekly visits strengthen case continuity and improve child safety. The program is also extremely cost efficient, with a single staff member supervising 30 advocates who serve roughly 100 children, working out to a cost of only about \$1500 per child per year.

Expanding local CASA programs would help our state address the needs of abused and neglected children. I am proud to work with my colleagues in both parties, including Representative Katsma, Senator Olsen, Senator Johnson, and many others, on this important legislation.

Again, thank you for your consideration of this important proposal.



74<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

STATE CAPITOL P.O. BOX 8953, MADISON, WI 53708

TEL. (608) 266-7690 TOLL-FREE (888) 534-0074 FAX (608) 282-3674

E-MAIL [REP.MEYERS@LEGIS.WISCONSIN.GOV](mailto:REP.MEYERS@LEGIS.WISCONSIN.GOV) WEB [HTTP://LEGIS.WISCONSIN.GOV/ASSEMBLY/74/MEYERS](http://LEGIS.WISCONSIN.GOV/ASSEMBLY/74/MEYERS)



TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Family Law

FROM: Sue Schwartz, Executive Director  
Wisconsin CASA Association

DATE: January 30, 2018

RE: Support for AB 786

The Wisconsin CASA Association champions the needs of abused and neglected children by supporting and expanding local CASA programs. CASA's (court appointed special advocates) are highly screened, trained and supervised citizen-volunteers who advocate for the best interest of abused and/or neglected children. CASA's are given legal authority under Wisconsin Statute 48.236.

The current CASA network in Wisconsin consists of eight local CASA programs serving eleven counties. In 2016, 462 CASA volunteers served 690 children leaving more than 5,900 children or 89.2% of eligible children without a CASA volunteer. In 2017, the number of children served increased by 9.4% to 755. Sixty-one Wisconsin counties do not have the benefits of a local CASA program.

The CASA network in Wisconsin faces many challenges in achieving the vision of giving every child a voice and a hopeful future. All CASA programs are non-profit organizations who continually face funding challenges. Existing local CASA programs lack the funding to build the staffing capacity required to serve every child in their counties. Funding remains a barrier to starting new CASA programs in unserved counties.

Passage of AB 786 will benefit existing local CASA programs and help create additional CASA programs throughout the state. CASA is a cost-effective program. One full-time staff supervises up to 30 volunteers who serve as many as 75 children at an average cost of \$1,500 per volunteer annually. According to Judge Horne from La Crosse County, "CASA's are the stabilizing force in a child's life."

Studies show that children who have the support of a consistent, stable adult - their CASA - often have improved outcomes in many aspects of their lives including: improved academic performance; better communication skills; shorter time in foster care; less likely to return to foster care; fewer placement changes and are more likely to receive needed services.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the CASA mission and the ongoing impact CASA has on the lives of children, their families and the child welfare system. I respectfully urge your support of AB786 to serve more vulnerable children in our state.



TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Family Law  
FROM: Sandy Johnson, Program Director, CASA of Rock County  
DATE: January 30, 2018  
RE: Support for AB786

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Rock County is grateful for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of Assembly Bill 786. On behalf of CASA, our volunteer advocates, and the vulnerable children we serve, we thank you for considering an increase in state funding that will strengthen this vital program throughout the state of Wisconsin.

Children who have suffered from parental abuse and/or neglect deserve strong, consistent advocacy and they deserve to know that someone will speak up for their best interests. Unfortunately, like many other counties in Wisconsin, the Health and Human Services Agencies in Rock County continue to experience a severe workforce crisis due to high staff turnover (57% turnover in 2016) and unmanageable caseloads (approximately 17 cases per worker) that impacts their ability to adequately attend and monitor all the needs of the children placed in out-of-home care.

Like all CASA programs, we strive to achieve the same goal: to ensure that every abused and neglected child is placed in a safe, permanent home while taking into consideration each of their emotional, educational and physical needs. Throughout FY2017, the volunteers and staff at CASA of Rock County logged over 4000 hours advocating for the needs, services and permanency of 81 children. Unfortunately, only 27% of the children appointed to CASA were served, leaving over 180 children on our wait list.

As the Director of CASA of Rock County, I could share endless stories about how our CASA volunteers truly make a positive difference in the lives of these children. Instead, I would like to share with you the value the Rock County Juvenile Court Judge, R. Alan Bates, has in the CASA program.

*"It is my privilege to serve as the Juvenile Court Judge for Rock County. In that role I have worked with Rock County CASA for many years. Each week I deal with parents who are not able to meet the needs of their children. I appoint a CASA representative to help the Court monitor the children and families between court appearances and to give a voice to the children,*

*In most of my cases, months go by between court reviews. However CASA provides me with updates on a regular basis. The updates remind me of the status and goals of each case and how the parties are doing. Occasionally I will receive a report from CASA indicating that there is a problem and I can schedule a hearing to deal with the issue. Sometimes at a regular hearing only the CASA volunteer has recognized a problem and brought it to our attention. The professional staff of Rock County CASA makes sure that the information I receive is accurate, prompt and incisive. The volunteers make sure that the information I receive is from the heart."*

Your support and passage of AB786 will not only help CASA programs throughout the state of Wisconsin grow; it will also help ensure the safe passage of children out of foster care, to the benefit of their children, and generations to come.

TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Family Law

FR: Michael J. Rosborough, Reserve Circuit Court Judge and Member-at-Large, Wisconsin CASA Association

DA: 01/30/2018

RE: Support for AB 786

After 31 years on the bench as Vernon County's one and only Circuit Court Judge I retired last summer, having presided over hundreds of cases in my county and others involving children in need of protection and/or services (CHIPS). Early in my career I was introduced to CASA and identified it as a program that would be of great benefit to judges in managing cases where circumstances required the removal of traumatized children from their homes. With that in mind, I convinced the fledgling CASA program in neighboring La Crosse County to extend programming to Vernon and eventually persuaded my county board to include a modest appropriation for CASA in the annual court budget.

A child deserves a home where that child can reach full potential and grow up to be a well-adjusted and productive contributor to the community. In CHIPS cases the goal is to identify and provide appropriate services for the child and family in order that the child can be reach adulthood in a nurturing, safe and permanent home.

CASA volunteers are requested by judges and then assigned to children in CHIPS cases. They advocate for the children at court hearings, providing unique perspectives important to the decision making process. Their active participation helps to insure that appropriate and effective resources are marshalled and put in place.

As retirement neared I was recruited and agreed to serve as an at-large member of the Wisconsin CASA Association Board. I have learned that CASA has well-established, successful programs in some parts of the state and programs that are striving to gain footing in others.

Too many children in our state are the victims of generational poverty and are exposed to toxic combinations of domestic violence, adult substance abuse and mental illness to name but a few of the reasons why human services departments are required to intervene. Every CHIPS child would benefit from a CASA volunteer and judges who are hearing these cases would benefit as well. I encourage you to assist in providing all Wisconsin courts with this important resource.

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My name is Sandy Johnson and I am the Program Director for CASA of Rock County.

I am also a CASA volunteer.

I am A Court Appointed Special Advocate.

I want you to think for a moment about how many people you have identified as your mommy.

How many people have you called mommy?

Before I met my CASA kiddos, they were removed from their home because their parents fell prey to the deathly grip of heroin addiction.

At the age of 2 & 3 they lost mommy #1.

They were placed in a foster home, and for a while, they were taken care of by mommy #2.

By the time I met the girls, 3 months later, they had been moved again and were living with mommy #3.

I served as their CASA advocate for 18 months, and during that time we went to many places.

We went to parks, petting farms, libraries, the movies, and the State Capital.

In addition to these outings, we read books, played with Barbies, colored and made crafts. We blew countless bubbles, went through multiple boxes of sidewalk chalk and made more silly faces than I can count.

As their CASA advocate, I listened to them and spoke with everyone involved in their life to make sure all their needs were being met. I wrote court reports and submitted them to Judge Bates, updating him on their progress and informing him of any concerns I had in regard to their well-being.

Things were going okay with mommy #3, and it looked like she was going to be their forever mommy through adoption, but then I received the heart-wrenching phone call from her stating that she was sorry...they decided to move. She was giving her 30-day notice to human services.

Wisconsin

Association

Susan Schwartz  
Executive Director



Every child has a voice  
and a hopeful future.

## Mission

The Wisconsin Court Appointed  
Special Advocates ( )  
Association champions the needs  
of abused and neglected children  
by supporting and expanding local  
CASA programs.

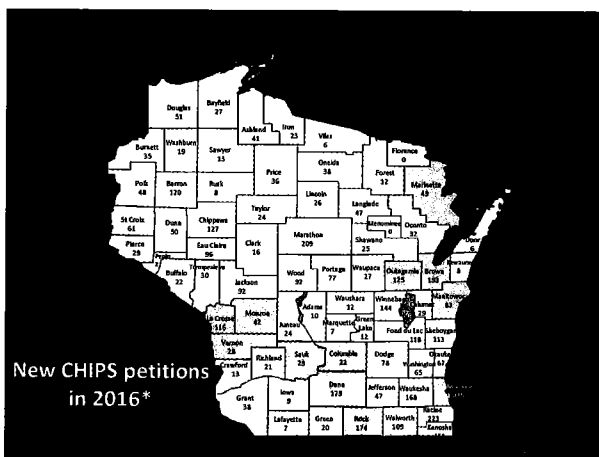
### Court Appointed Special Advocates

Citizen-volunteers who advocate for the best  
interests of abused and/or neglected children  
Appointed by judges  
Given legal authority under Wis Stat 48.236  
A national network of nearly 1,000 state and  
local programs

Wisconsin has 8 local programs serving 11 counties

In 2017, 449 CASA volunteers served 755 Wisconsin  
children

2016 data: more than 5,700 children or 89.2% of eligible  
children served



- Brown County – 280
- Dane County – 115
- Fox Cities (Outagamie) – 102
- La Crosse, Monroe and Vernon Counties – 93
- Manitowoc County – 22
- Milwaukee County – 63
- Rock County – 80
- Columbia Counties  
Shawano, Waupaca, Kenosha,  
Iowa, Grant, Crawford and Richland



**Statutes**

- ✓ Wis. Stat. 48.236 describes the qualifications, activities, authority and access to information of CASA volunteers.
- ✓ Wis. Stat. 48.07(5) describes the required MOU with the court.
- ✓ Enacted in 1999.

**Judges**

*Give CASA volunteers authority to act.*

**Professional Supervision**

*Volunteers are supervised by professionals.*

**Board of Directors**

*Makes leadership accountable.*

**National CASA Standards**

*Extensive training in trauma informed care, cultural competency, etc. utilizing evidence-based practices.*

per Wisconsin Statutes

- Gather information from significant adults
- Review all pertinent documents
- Weekly visits with the child
- Provide written reports/recommendations to the court
- Attend hearings
- Advocate for the child's best interests
- Monitor the case until the CHIPS order is ended

**the support of one consistent adult**

- Children with a CASA spend less time in foster care .
- Weekly visits with the child(ren):
  - Strengthens case continuity
  - Improves child safety
- Half as likely to re-enter foster care .
- Fewer out of home placements/placement changes .
- More likely to receive services to:
  - Improve academic performance and behavior
  - Increase ability to respond to adversity

- Significant cost savings to many systems
- Cost effective:
  - National CASA Standards: one staff supervises up to 30 advocates who serve up to 75 children
  - Approximately \$1,500 per child annually
- Fewer placement changes
- Highest frequency of contact with the child:
  - Minimizes safety concerns – CASA's are mandated reporters
  - Address issues before they become a crisis
  - Advocate following reunification for improved success

- Created by a judge for judges
- Increases the amount of information judges receive
- Provides a monthly report to the court
- Weekly contact with the child
- "eyes and ears of the court"

**"CASA's are the stabilizing force in a child's life."**

Judge Horne  
La Crosse County Circuit Court, Branch 4

- Lack of funding to expand existing local CASA programs
- Lack of funding to start new local CASA programs
- Need more staff statewide to build capacity
- Statewide awareness of CASA and its impact
- Judges assign CASA's to all eligible children



Funding to expand all 8 existing local programs:

Funding to start new local programs

Funding to add adjacent counties to existing local programs

Assign a CASA to every eligible child

Statewide awareness campaign

Making the Case for the CASA Model  
National CASA Publication

Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building  
Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience  
National Scientific Council on the Developing Child

CASA: Evidence of Effectiveness