



PRESS RELEASE
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Waning federal funding for victims of crime compounds financial struggles for CASA child advocates

Funding losses continue to impact Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs in Oregon, putting advocacy for vulnerable children at risk. While CASA received Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) federal funding during 2017 – 2023, dwindling funds have eliminated CASA services from this funding pool. Further complicating CASA’s potential for VOCA funding, is that Oregon’s status as a sanctuary state conflicts with new federal guidance on the VOCA funding stream, putting all VOCA funding in Oregon at risk, including emergency and advocacy services for all victims of crime.

CASA’s advocacy has become even more essential as the quality of state services for children in foster care has been called into question. As a result of a settlement in the Wyatt B. v. Kotek lawsuit, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) is responsible for reducing the amount of abuse that occurs in foster homes, making sure children get timely medical and mental health care, and decreasing the number of children and young adults who come back into foster care, among others. CASA’s individualized support and advocacy can help mitigate some of the problems faced by children in the foster care system.

Funding allows CASA programs to recruit, screen, and support community volunteers who advocate for children in foster care. Each volunteer is responsible for getting to know the needs of a child or sibling group and making individualized recommendations to the child’s judge. Recommendations can include specialized therapy, placement with relatives, tutoring, extracurricular activities, and more.

Unfortunately, this spring and summer marked a series of losses of anticipated funding for CASA, including 1.7 million in earmarked federal dollars and 3 million in state funding intended to backfill lost VOCA grants. Further, the National CASA Association temporarily lost their federal funding, which was reinstated in an appeals process. This caused staff layoffs, threw their grants process into upheaval, and delayed much-needed funding to some struggling CASA programs.

CASA programs in Oregon are currently updating their budgets, spending their limited reserves, restructuring, and bracing for the unknown. According to Stephanie Brown, Executive Director of the Oregon CASA Network, some of the programs have been forced to reduce staff and serve fewer children. “Despite efforts to prioritize services to the children who need CASA the most, the truth is that every child in foster care should have a CASA advocate,” Brown said. “These children have experienced abuse and neglect—often profound and repeated traumas—and a CASA advocate can ensure that their needs are met and that they know at least one safe, supportive adult cares about them.”

If you would like to help, reach out to the Oregon CASA Network or the CASA program nearest you to learn more about their needs. Programs are accepting monetary donations and, in most locations, are seeking additional volunteer advocates.

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