

Kansas CASA testimony in regard to House Bill 2381: Requiring the court to appoint an attorney to represent a child who is the subject of child in need of care proceedings and allowing for the optional appointment of a guardian ad litem.

**House Judiciary Committee
March 7, 2024**

Kansas CASA (KCA) and the Kansas CASA Network (KCN) both function with intent to ensure that children in the foster care system in the State of Kansas have their best interests represented as they navigate the system and subsequent court proceedings. KCN recruits, screens, trains, and provides on-going supervision and guidance to volunteers who are appointed by the District Court Judge in each county to advocate for the best interests of children under the court's protection due to abuse, neglect, and abandonment. KCA and KCN operate in accordance with guidelines established by the Office of Judicial Administration and the National CASA/GAL Association Standards. In 2022, KCN provided resources and support for over 1300 children in the foster care system through the advocacy efforts of over 800 volunteers.

Each CASA Volunteer builds rapport with the child to whom they are assigned to understand case circumstances as well as gather information regarding the case from interested parties, including but not limited to the biological family, foster care placement, and other professionals with information that is pertinent to the case. Information acquired through the course of these interactions is prepared in a court report that outlines best interest recommendations on behalf of the child. In addition, the CASA Volunteer works in collaboration with the guardian ad litem (GAL) to ensure that the child's wishes and best interests are dually represented during CINC proceedings. Both the CASA Volunteer and the GAL are assigned by the court as is delineated under Kansas statutes.

KCA and KCN would like to request that additional consideration be given to HB 2381 and its potential implications on the existing Child in Need of Care systems and processes as outlined in Kansas statutes. As mentioned above, existing processes exist for consideration of both a child's wishes and a child's best interest when they are represented by a CASA Volunteer and an assigned GAL. Introduction of another party, such as an attorney who is specifically assigned to solely represent a child's wishes, may create undue complications that will impede progress for reintegration or permanency solutions. Furthermore, factors such as age of child, developmental limitations, and other extraneous influences may further complicate efficacy of the recommended or identified child's wishes.