

Dear Governor Dayton and Child Protection Task Force Members,

First, thank you for the important work that you are doing to help ensure the safety of children and improve Minnesota's Child Welfare System. Your role – and task – is significant, just as we are confident the outcome will be.

We are writing this letter in response to your request for public input to help inform the Task Force's upcoming recommendations and the consideration that they will receive by you, Governor Dayton. To give our comments context, it may be useful to clarify who we are and what we do.

As you are likely aware, Guardians ad Litem (GAL) are advocates assigned to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children during court processes. While some of these individuals are paid for their time, 48% percent are lay volunteers who are trained to serve as a voice for these children. CASA Minnesota, the organization for whom we serve as board members, is dedicated to helping recruit, train and support these critical volunteers who provided advocacy for more than 1026 children last year in Ramsey and Hennepin counties alone.

Our volunteer GALs participated in our recent GAL Board survey to collect information and insights on the use of the Screening Guidelines and Family Assessment. GAL Program Manager Alex Miller presented the findings of that survey to the Taskforce on November 5, 2014. We are writing today to go on record in support of the recommendations that were presented on behalf of the GAL program. We work closely with the program and are, therefore, well aware of the issues these initiatives stand to address.

Specifically, we believe strongly that the following must be undertaken:

- ***Develop a family assessment oversight committee*** charged with reviewing all family assessment cases pending for more than six months, closed by the Agency because the parents stopped participating and those cases in which Family Assessment was offered but parents declined;
- ***Develop an interagency committee*** to determine how outcomes for children in Family Assessment should be measured, what data is needed and how the data will be used;
- ***Repeal the recent statutory change*** regarding consideration of prior maltreatment reports;
- ***Modify the Family Assessment and Screening Guidelines to require consideration to the reporter's profession and experience*** with the child and family when making the decision whether to accept a report;
- ***Modify the Family Assessment and Screening Guidelines to require consideration of past Family Assessment efforts*** with a given family, including a parent's refusal to accept services;
- ***Allocate resources to ensure that services are readily available***, including trauma informed care, to children and families in all areas of the state; and
- ***Funding needs should be addressed*** to ensure the department has adequate staffing, as lack of resources and high caseload sizes impact the work of the counties providing case management. The GAL Program also needs to receive adequate funding to ensure every child has an advocate. Both departments have limited resources in which to provide adequate services for the children they serve.

Thank you, again, for your commitment and diligence regarding these important issues impacting children in need.

Sincerely,

CASA Minnesota Board of Directors

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