MY TEXAS STATE LEGISLATORS ARE:

Senator: __________________________________________________________

Phone Number: ___________________________________________________

Representative: ___________________________________________________

Phone Number: ___________________________________________________

CONTACTING LEGISLATORS:

**Lieutenant Governor**
The Honorable (full name)
Lieutenant Governor of Texas
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711-2068
Salutation:
Dear Governor (last name):

**Speaker of the House**
The Honorable (full name)
Speaker of the House
Texas House of Representatives
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768-2910
Salutation:
Dear Speaker (last name):

**State Senator**
The Honorable (full name)
Texas Senate
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711-2068
Salutation:
Dear Senator (last name):

**State Representative**
The Honorable (full name)
Texas House of Representatives
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768-2910
Salutation:
Dear Representative (last name):
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Why is Legislative Advocacy Important?

Because it works! Legislators are much more likely to listen and take action on a bill if they hear from their constituents that it is important to them. Without the help of volunteers across Texas, our priority bills are less likely to be successful.

Together, we can make a powerful impact on the child protection system by representing the best interests of children from the courtroom to the Capitol!

Why Are CASA Volunteers Such Effective Legislative Advocates for Children?

For the same reasons that they are effective advocates in court! CASA volunteers are:

- Well trained to speak up for children professionally and persuasively.
- Motivated to serve the best interest of Texas’ most vulnerable children. Legislators know that volunteers don’t have financial incentives or other hidden agendas when they speak up for children.
- Community members, constituents and voters, which brings perspective and power to their advocacy.
- Knowledgeable about how the child protection system works (and does not work) and can share personal case examples of each, which helps to put a face on the issues.
- Passionate about helping children. Their passion is contagious!

“Texas’ children will always need a strong advocate by their side, and Texas will continue to look at CASA to help lead that effort.”

—Governor Greg Abbott
TEXAS LEGISLATURE 101

• Texas has a biennial legislature that meets in Regular Session starting on the second Tuesday of January in odd-numbered years. The 85th Legislative Session convenes on January 10, 2017.

• Regular Sessions last for 140 days or 20 weeks. The Governor can also call Special Sessions of the legislature, which last 30 days or until the legislature decides to adjourn.

• Texas has a bicameral legislature with two lawmaking bodies - the Texas House of Representatives and the Texas Senate.

• The House has 150 members elected to two-year terms (average population of a district is around 150,000). The presiding officer in the House is the Speaker, who is elected by a vote of the House members.

• The Senate has 31 members who normally serve four-year terms (average population of a district is around 800,000). The Lieutenant Governor presides over the Senate and is elected statewide.

"The work you [CASA] do is really a great service to our children. You make such a difference in court representing children who do not have anybody to represent and speak on their behalf..."

—Texas State Senator Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa
A Legislative Advocacy Team (LAT) is a group of committed CASA volunteers who take their advocacy for children to the next level by using the experience and knowledge they have gained as volunteers to advocate for change in the child protection system. Each LAT has at least one Chair: a volunteer who agrees to be the face of the LAT and the point of contact for the group. In addition to the Chair, there is at least one CASA staff person who is responsible for supporting the team.

LATs enable volunteers to advocate for children on a larger scale and work towards solutions to the systemic problems they encounter in their role as CASA volunteers. This brings another degree of satisfaction to their role as an advocate and also gives them the chance to be a voice for change not only for the child(ren) they serve, but for every child in the child protection system!

For LAT members, there are many roles and tasks available based on each individual’s availability and comfort level. Some members feel comfortable writing letters or op-eds to support certain changes to the system, while others prefer to interact directly with legislators and their staff by meeting with them and inviting them to CASA-related events. LAT members may also testify before a legislative committee to illustrate the relevancy and importance of a bill by sharing a particular experience they have had as a CASA volunteer. Texas CASA encourages LATs to brainstorm activities quarterly, with our assistance and support.

To start a LAT in your program, contact the Texas CASA Public Policy team at publicpolicy@texascasa.org.
TIPS FOR CASA LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

• **Keep up to date!**  
Stay informed on our work with the legislature, including calls to action, by visiting our blog, The CASA Voice, at [www.texascasa.org/casa-voice](http://www.texascasa.org/casa-voice).

• **Develop strong relationships with your Senator or Representative’s legislative staff.**  
The district director, legislative director and chief of staff are very important, but even the administrative assistant can help your advocacy efforts. Legislative staffers are the people who do the “leg work” – they research bills, get background information and keep the legislator versed on current issues and/or bills. Explaining your concerns and suggestions to them will help get your issue before the legislator. *If you can convince the staffer, they can often convince their boss.*

• **Be constructive with your criticism of the child protection system.**  
It is important to talk about the challenges you see within the system without badmouthing or blaming Child Protective Services (CPS), attorneys, judges or foster parents. Negativity can diminish your image as well as CASA’s image as a whole.

• **Tell a personal CASA story.**  
Legislators and staffers meet with people every day about statistics, economics and policies. Your stories (without using names or other identifying information) will grab their attention and pull at their heartstrings.

• **Make a case for CASA using your experiences as a volunteer.**  
You don’t need to be an expert on child protection statistics or the budget to advocate for CASA. Your stories based on your personal experiences as a volunteer, along with your passion to help children and the fact that you are a constituent, are your most persuasive attributes.

• **Thank legislators and their staff frequently.**  
You can never thank them enough for their time and support of CASA.

• **Remind them what CASA is and what we do.**  
Don’t assume they know the basics of CASA and CASA advocacy just because they are already supporters of us or because they say they know. Chances are they don’t, and those that do can always use a reminder and may even learn something new. Even our biggest supporters don’t really get it. Yet!
HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

LEGEND
- House
- Senate
- Governor
- Chance for bill failure
- Extra info

A senator may call for written notice of a hearing 48 hours in advance, a tactic used to slow down or defeat a bill.

The House has 150 members. The Senate has 31 members. Sessions held biennially for 140 days. Bills can originate in either chamber.

Approved House bill and amendments printed and sent to Senate for consideration.

60% of senators present and voting required to bring bill to Senate floor.

A senator may filibuster and hold the floor for an unlimited debate.

A tie vote or failure to gain a simple majority.
STATE FUNDING ISSUES

- Increase state funding for CASA programs under HHSC from $13 million to $15 million annually for the 2018-2019 fiscal biennium to support local CASA program growth in order to serve more children.
- Seek continued financial support through the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to expand Texas CASA’s Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) program.
- Support state funding to lower CPS caseloads and increase caseworker compensation to help reduce turnover.

COURT AND LEGAL PRACTICES AND EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

- Support efforts to improve docketing and other court practices in order to recognize and accommodate the special needs of the child protection system.
- Support policies and legislation to improve the quality and funding for legal representation of children in the child protection system.
- Support criminal justice system reforms to remedy legal barriers that disproportionately impact children and youth in state care.
- Support legislation and policies that improve educational outcomes for children and youth in state care.
SYSTEMIC CHANGES TO THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

• Improve foster care placement decisions to reduce disruptions and increase placement proximity to children’s families and home communities.
• Increase foster care capacity to provide appropriate caregiving in the least restrictive setting.
• Promote trauma-informed understanding of children and trauma-informed care throughout the child protection system.
• Consolidate all child abuse and neglect investigations under CPS before Child Care Licensing (CCL) is moved to The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).
• Increase timely access to needed medical, mental health and other support services for children and families involved with CPS.
• Promote policies and legislation that hold the best interest of the child as the primary determinant in placement and other CPS decisions and respect the voice of children when making policy decisions and recommendations.
• Support policies and legislation to improve permanency outcomes for youth aged 14 and older in state care, and provide better services and support for youth who age out of care.
GROWING TOWARD A CASA FOR EVERY CHILD

The goal of having a CASA volunteer for every child who has been a victim of abuse or neglect has been the driving force for Texas CASA and the CASA community.

While we have made significant strides toward achieving this goal, we still have a long way to go to close the gap. Additionally, the number of children in care continues to increase each year – creating a greater need for more CASA volunteers.

State financial support has been critical to CASA’s ongoing growth in Texas, and we believe it is an investment in Texas’ future. Utilizing State financial support, CASA efficiently leverages more than a million hours of CASA volunteer service annually, which is conservatively valued at more than $25 million. In addition, every appropriated dollar invested in supporting CASA programs generates two dollars in private charitable contributions.

The CASA model is an innovative public-non-profit partnership, and it is our goal to work as a partner with the Governor and legislative leaders to provide the best possible outcomes for abused and neglected children and youth within the child protection system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NETWORK GROWTH FOR TEXAS CASA</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children in State Custody</td>
<td>41,305</td>
<td>47,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA Programs</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties Served</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA Volunteers</td>
<td>4,629</td>
<td>8,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Served by CASA programs</td>
<td>18,742</td>
<td>25,947</td>
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OUR VISION

We envision a safe and positive future for all Texas children.

OUR MISSION

The mission of Texas CASA is to support local CASA volunteer advocacy programs and to advocate for effective public policy for children in the child protection system.
One of the least understood problems in the Texas foster care system is the issue of geographic proximity of substitute care placements to children’s homes of origin. Sixty percent of children are placed outside their home county and 20 percent are placed in another DFPS region - often hundreds of miles from their home county. While these remote placements are sometimes inevitable when a child is in need of specialized care, Texas can and should improve placement proximity to children’s home communities.

The inability to keep children and youth in their home communities adversely affects everyone in the system—children, their families, CPS caseworkers, judges, CASA, providers and others. This problem also imposes significant and largely unrecognized costs on the child protection system. Some of the negative impacts of moving children far from their home communities include:

- The trauma that children experience when they are moved away from their family, friends, schools and other support systems;
- The disruption and loss of academic progress for children who are forced to change schools;
- An increased difficulty in pursuing and achieving family reunification when children and families are geographically separated, especially because transportation options for family visits are limited;
- The costs, time and difficulty for CPS workers to visit, transport and adequately monitor children under their supervision;
- The inability of children and youth to fully participate in court and judicial proceedings; and
- The unrecognized drain on system capacity associated with placement disruptions.

Texas CASA is asking DFPS and legislative leaders to recognize the adverse impacts of distant placements on foster children and the child protection system. DFPS can improve placement decisions by utilizing new technology and developing policies and procedures that promote local placements and enhance placement stability.
Texas CASA was appropriated $548,600 for the 2016-2017 biennium through the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) in the 84th Legislative Session to develop a statewide model of Family Finding. This model, which is now known as Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE), primarily involves joint training of CASA and CPS over four days with ongoing coaching and support, and focuses on creating a shared-workload model where CASA is used as a greater resource to CPS caseworkers.

The goal of CFE is to establish and strengthen support networks around children and youth in foster care, as well as their family, and to improve permanency outcomes, both physical (legal) and relational (emotional). CFE stresses the importance of:

- Involvement of the support network in the planning and decision-making for the child
- Placement with kin or fictive kin whenever possible but not as the primary reason for contacting the family
- Connection as a contributing factor for positive child outcomes

In its first year, CFE was utilized for children and youth in the temporary managing conservatorship (TMC) of the state as soon as a CASA was appointed. In year two, along with working with TMC, the CFE model will be adapted to best support children and youth in permanent managing conservatorship (PMC), or long-term foster care.
"CASA is one of the best volunteer organizations I have ever been associated with."

— Texas State Representative John Otto