



STRENGTHENING THE VOICES
OF CASA STATEWIDE

HB 2058 & SB 52: ENSURING NORMALCY IN FOSTER CARE

WHY NORMALCY MATTERS

It is widely accepted that normalcy is a critical component in healthy social, emotional and cognitive development.¹ Many of us recall doing “typical” things during our childhoods: like going to a friend’s house, taking a school trip, working an after-school job, joining a club, dating and learning to drive. While we may take them for granted, these “normal” experiences help youth develop interests, acquire skills and build lasting, supportive relationships. Additionally, participation in extracurricular activities is correlated with better GPA performance and an increased likelihood of being enrolled in college at the age of 21.² Structured, school-based extracurricular involvement is also associated with reduced rates of dropouts, lower rates of substance use and reduced rates of delinquent behavior.³

Children in foster care are forced to endure things that no child should have to experience, like the trauma of abuse and neglect, placement insecurity, and separation from their home communities, all due to no fault of their own. Foster care should be a better experience for a child than the circumstances that led to their placement in foster care. Foster care should, among other things, function as a service that provides opportunities to form positive bonds with peers and adults. Without normalcy, foster care can be a stigmatizing and isolating experience. Normalcy not only impacts children’s well-being, but it can also help children facilitate a stronger bond with their caregivers.

HB 2058 & SB 52

This legislation promotes age-appropriate normalcy activities for children by requiring the court to review the Department’s efforts to ensure the child has regular and ongoing normalcy opportunities, whether or not those activities are listed in the child’s service plan. Courts are already required to review these efforts at permanency hearings for children in temporary managing conservatorship; this clean-up bill requires courts to review efforts at permanency hearings for children in permanent managing conservatorship (PMC). Kids in PMC are among the most vulnerable in the system and often do not have an attorneys or CASA advocates, so this court review is crucial to ensure that their need for normalcy is addressed.

¹ Center for the Study of Social Policy. (2014). Advancing healthy adolescent development and well-being. Retrieved June 23, 2015, from www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/youth-thrive/2014/Youth-Thrive_AdvancingHealthy-Adolescent-Development-and-WellBeing.pdf

² Jacquelynne S. Eccles & Bonnie L. Barber. *Student Council, Volunteering, Basketball, or Marching Band: What Kind of Extracurricular Involvement Matters?*. 14 J. Adolescent Res. 10, 25 (1999).

³ Amy F. Feldman & Jennifer L. Matjasko. *The Role of School-Based Extracurricular Activities in Adolescent Development: A Comprehensive Review and Future Directions*. 75 Rev. Educ. Res. 159, 193 (2005)