

# *News Advisory*

## From the Rhode Island Judiciary



### **Rhode Island CASA program looking for volunteer advocates to be voices for abused or neglected children in state care**

Training Classes Scheduled for January and March

**December 6, 2018:** Rhode Island's Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (CASA) program is accepting applications from individuals over age 21 who are interested in serving as volunteer advocates for abused and neglected children in DCYF care.

Daytime training will be offered at the Noel Judicial Complex (Kent County Courthouse) in Warwick over five weekday sessions scheduled from January 15 to January 31. Evening trainings are scheduled for the Garrahy Judicial Complex in Providence from March 7 to March 26, during seven weeknight sessions and one Saturday session.

“At any given time, the CASA program represents approximately 2,800 abused or neglected kids who need consistent, caring adults to give them a voice in court and represent their best interests. Right now there are hundreds of children in care who could benefit from the involvement of a committed CASA volunteer,” said Rhode Island Family Court Chief Judge Michael B. Forte.

Advocates serve as “the voice of the child” and as the “eyes and ears” of the court. They visit monthly with children in their assigned cases, and often become the only consistent adult in a child's life from the time the case opens until it closes. Advocates gather information from caretakers, schools, teachers, medical professionals, and other service providers to determine how the child is functioning, and then share that information with supervising attorneys and Family Court judges.

“Family Court judges rely on the observations and information provided by our volunteer CASA advocates,” Chief Judge Forte added. “They serve a critical role for both the Court and our children.”

CASA advocates are ordinary people who serve an extraordinary role in the lives of children, helping to ensure that they do not fall through the cracks as they move around the child welfare system. Volunteers come from all backgrounds, vocations, and professions. They must have a valid driver's license, and must possess good judgment and effective communication skills.

All volunteer candidates undergo background checks and personal interviews before entering the 30-hour training program. Upon completion, volunteers are sworn in as court-appointed special advocates and partner with staff attorneys on casework.

According to the National CASA Association, a child served by a CASA volunteer is more likely to be adopted, half as likely to re-enter foster care, less likely to spend time in long-term foster care, and more likely to do well in school.

Rhode Island CASA was developed as a volunteer program by the Family Court in 1978. It became the second CASA program in the nation, and is now one of almost 950 affiliates. For more information about the CASA program, or to obtain a volunteer application packet, visit <https://friendsofricasa.org/volunteer/> or call (401) 822-6706.

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