



CASA of New Jersey –FY16 State Budget Request Backgrounder

CASA is requesting your assistance to restore the \$2million budget appropriation of FY15 in the FY16 State budget. We are a model public-private partnership, authorized by State Statute to help the Court and Child Welfare systems ensure the best interests of children removed from home because of abuse or neglect. CASA performs a critical function on behalf of the State, helping DCF ensure the safety, well-being, and permanency of these children, while assisting the Judiciary in making the best decisions possible for them.

In FY14, nearly 1,500 Court Appointed Special Advocates -- CASA volunteers -- across New Jersey advocated for 3,064 children, helping protect their best interests and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our Court and Child Welfare Systems.

I. CASA Growth and Budget History

- a. CASA has been receiving State Funding for over 10 years. Until FY15, CASA had not experienced a net increase in State Funding since FY08 – seven years ago.
 - i. From FY04-FY08, CASA’s State Budget funding grew by \$200K-\$250K a year, to \$1.15M.
 - ii. In FY10, that funding was cut by 25% (\$289,000), to \$861,000. This cut impeded CASA’s ability to advocate for sufficient numbers of children. Like all fluctuations in State Funding, the effect was felt in the following fiscal year. DCF attempted to mitigate the cut in FY11 by contracting with CASA for volunteer training. This contract allowed DCF to draw down a substantial amount of Federal IV-E funding and provided CASA with an additional \$100,000.
- b. In FY13, CASA State Budget funding was restored to \$1.15M. However, in that same year:
 - i. CASA stopped receiving the \$100,000 in DCF contract funding, making the total additional funding to CASA \$189,000, not \$289,000. CASA continues to report to DCF on volunteer training and DCF continues to draw down significant Federal IV-E funding based on the reports.
 - ii. CASA lost ~\$750,000 statewide due to the elimination of IOLTA discretionary funding as well as significant cuts to federal funding passed through the National CASA Association.
- c. In FY15, with the support of both the Legislature and Administration, CASA State Funding was increased to \$2M, more closely reflecting the public-private partnership that CASA represents (bringing us closer to State Funding providing one-third of CASA revenue statewide). This increase is allowing us to meet the new Judiciary mandates while also sustaining CASA services to children already in the programs and expanding CASA services to advocate for more than 400 additional children.

II. Current State Funding of \$2M is Justified and Serves a Critical Purpose

- a. NJ State Judiciary Standards for CASA Programs and Volunteers were promulgated last fiscal year, expanding the role of CASA of NJ and increasing our responsibilities and those of local CASA programs.

Increased State Funding was needed to fulfill those new mandates (particularly in the areas of quality review and data), and will need to be maintained in order to meet those requirements on an ongoing basis.

- b. In FY14, CASA only reached about 22% of the children removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. The FY15 State Budget increase will allow us to serve up to 400 additional children (bringing us to about 25%). That level of funding -- \$2M -- must be maintained in order to continue serving these additional children. If CASA State Funding is cut, many if not all of these children would have to be abandoned by the CASA programs.
- c. In the latest DCF Monitoring Report, the Federal Monitor found DCF to be out of compliance in a variety of areas in which CASA advocacy can be instrumental. One example is that only 56% of cases reviewed rated minimally acceptable for quality of case and service planning. This is a big area of focus for CASA advocacy; we believe that increasing the number of children with a CASA will improve this outcome.
- d. Prior to the FY15 increase, State Funding comprised just 17% of CASA funding statewide, despite the fact that CASA performs such an important state function. The FY15 increase to \$2M brings State Funding closer to the target of one-third of CASA funding statewide (more closely reflecting the public-private partnership that CASA represents).

III. State Funding is a Good Investment and Should be Restored to \$2M for FY16

- a. CASA's work reduces the State of NJ's cost of caring for children in placement.
 - i. CASA helps ensure that needed services are provided in the timeliest manner and are the most targeted to meet the individual's needs, getting children what they need when they need it.
 - ii. CASA's work to reduce the number of moves and ensure that kids are in the least restrictive placement possible saves the state money in the cost of both placement and education.
 - iii. CASA works to reduce the overall time a child remains in placement. Even if CASA only reduced that time by 1 month for each child served, this would equal a savings of over \$6M in FY14 (based on \$2,000/mo to keep a child in foster care, multiplied by 3,064 children served). But in just five cases, CASA of NJ was able to document a savings of over \$3.8M based on actual budget figures.
 - iv. CASA volunteers from across the state donated nearly \$4.1M worth of services in FY14.
- b. CASA leverages State Funding and allows the State of NJ additional Federal Claiming
 - i. CASA programs raise over \$4 for every state dollar we receive in order to help NJ's neediest children (and use State Budget funds as a match for Federal funding and grants).
 - ii. CASA funding is eligible for significant Federal Title IV-E reimbursement; as CASA State Funding rises, so will the amount of potential federal claiming.
- c. CASA is requesting that the State fund a fair, reasonable percentage of our partnership – just one third. The remaining funds would be raised from private sources, with a small percentage coming from federal streams. If State Funding represented one third of CASA revenue in FY14, it would have been over \$2.2M -- \$200,000 more than what CASA is receiving in the FY15, and which we seek to have restored in the FY16 State Budget.