



**Illinois Association of Court Appointed Special Advocates
200 W Madison Street, Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606**

March 27, 2020

Dear CASA Supporters,

As we charter through unprecedented times during the COVID-19 pandemic, on a national and state level, we must keep Illinois' most vulnerable children at the forefront. Children in Illinois' foster care system are at an increased risk of harm compared to their peers. Fortunately, CASA volunteers continue to be strong supporters and advocates for the children they are appointed to, while still observing social distancing and self-quarantine protocols.

The Illinois CASA network and its 32 Local Programs are stepping up in new and creative ways to advocate from a distance for the 7176 youth in care the network is currently assigned to. Here are some of the action steps the Illinois CASA Network has collectively adopted:

- CASA Volunteers are communicating frequently, at least weekly with their assigned youth and families; utilizing phone, video conferencing and traditional letters.
- CASA Volunteers are also providing their respective Judiciary with regular court reports and court addendums to keep them informed.
- CASA Volunteers have demonstrated a renewed sense of urgency and are actively seeking ways to advocate for their assigned youth.
- The Local Programs are moving towards a nationally approved virtual pre-service training model.
- Illinois CASA is providing training to the Local Programs on enhanced interviewing skills specific to youth in care and COVID-19, among many other training resources.
- Illinois CASA is holding bi-weekly conference calls with the Executive Directors of the Local Programs to ensure they are kept abreast of the latest resources, news, guidance and laws impacting their programs.
- Illinois CASA is collaborating with the Private Agencies intimately to work on pressing case issues that need urgent resolution.
- Illinois CASA is in regular communication with DCFS to address specific case issues, as well as ongoing discussions surrounding recent policies related to unsupervised visitation and Illinois CASA's concerns.
- The Local Programs are also reaching out to former youth in care to remind them that they have a caring adult connection and bridging the gap to available resources.
- On a national level, the CASA Network is working with the National CASA/GAL Association for Children to ensure the Local Programs partake of the available resources related to COVID-19.

Illinois CASA along with the 32 Local Programs will continue to be the one consistent adult in the lives of the children we serve, during a period that has the potential to leave lasting physical and emotional scars. Our goal during this time is to ensure that the children we serve are not left behind amid a national and state crisis.

Best Regards,

Mari Christopherson
CEO, Illinois CASA

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