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## State Budget for 2022-2023 Makes New \$60,000,000 Investment in Court Appointed Special Advocates

**San Diego, CA, June 30, 2022** – Sharon M. Lawrence, Esq., CEO, announced that the California Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association has received an appropriation of \$60,000,000 in AB 178. The funding will be paid over three years; it was included in the final budget for Fiscal Year 2022-2023 signed today by California Governor Gavin Newsom.

California CASA, a private, nonprofit organization, is the statewide association serving and supporting a network of 44 local CASA programs throughout the state. These independent, nonprofit organizations, appointed by their local Superior Courts, are located in 51 of the state's 58 counties. California has more children and youth in foster care than any other state in the nation – 80,000 in the course of a year. Currently, only 16% of California foster children (13,000) have a CASA volunteer advocating on their behalf. However, within a decade, California CASA seeks to achieve an ambitious vision: to serve every child in California who needs a CASA by their side. This \$60,000,000 appropriation by the State Legislature is a major step towards that vision.

Sharon Lawrence said, “This extraordinary new funding from the Legislature is truly a game-changer for our local CASA programs, the nearly 10,000 volunteers they now recruit, train, and supervise, and the foster children for whom these CASAs advocate in court, in schools, and in the local communities. State funding for CASA has not kept pace with inflation nor with caseload growth, and the pandemic put enormous stress on the entire network. But we know that the CASA model, based on volunteer service (which last year equaled \$12,026,000 in service hours), is both efficient and effective and can save considerable tax resources while providing essential services to abused, neglected children in foster care. This significant appropriation will allow us to invest in our network, help them build efficiencies and expand their multiple bases of support, and ultimately help more children benefit from the life-transforming advocacy of a CASA. We are so grateful to the Legislature and Governor Newsom for recognizing this vital work.”

Kevin Gardner, Chair of the Board of Directors of California CASA, echoed Ms. Lawrence's gratitude. “Our Board has worked for many years to broaden the reach of the CASA model, and find the resources needed to allow our California network to serve more children in foster care. Thanks to this wonderful appropriation, we can launch an ambitious, long-range, multi-pronged strategy to provide more support, training, and counsel to our 44 local CASA programs. The goal is to ensure that they have the resources needed to provide the highest-quality advocacy to foster children in their counties.”

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The bill was championed by The Honorable Mark Stone (representing the 29<sup>th</sup> Assembly District encompassing areas in Santa Cruz, Monterey, and Santa Clara counties), who has had a long-standing commitment to children and youth. He said, “Children and youth in the foster system are some of the most vulnerable members of our society, and it is our responsibility as state legislators to ensure that they are protected and properly supported. The appropriation made to California CASA is a vital step in helping us to further do so. CASA volunteers play a critical role in the lives of foster children and these funds will help support their efforts across the state. I am proud and grateful to see its successful implementation.”

Of the total appropriation, \$48,000,000 will provide funding to the state’s local CASA programs to expand capacity, recruitment, and training and to stabilize local budgets and staffing. The remaining \$12,000,000 will be allocated to the California CASA Association to be used statewide for volunteer recruitment initiatives, shared resources and infrastructure, development of statewide training curricula, collection of data on program implementation and outcomes to support reports to the Legislature, and other uses to expand CASA services in the state. Funding will be channeled through the Judicial Council, which is providing an additional \$2,713,000 for the state’s CASA network, a continuation of its annual support for training and other activities within the network.

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**About California CASA**

California CASA was founded in 1987 to serve the individual local CASA programs throughout the state. The mission is to ensure that children in the foster care system have both a voice and the services they need for a stable future. There are currently approximately 80,000 children in California foster care—the largest foster population of any state in the nation. California CASA strengthens the state network of 44 local CASA programs and advocates for child welfare policy and practices that will improve the lives of all foster children. CASA volunteers are a crucial intervention to help ensure safety, speed up permanent placement, help children and youth thrive in school, and support positive health outcomes. A CASA volunteer is often the only consistent adult in a foster child or youth’s life who is not paid to support and advocate for them. Learn more at [www.californiacasa.org](http://www.californiacasa.org).

Sharon M. Lawrence, Esq., has been CEO of California CASA since 2017. Prior to that, she served for 20 years as CEO of Voices for Children (San Diego and Riverside Counties), one of the nation’s largest and most successful CASA programs. Chair of the 19-member Board of Directors is Kevin Gardner; the Board includes individuals representing all regions of the state. California CASA is a private, nonprofit organization funded by individuals, foundations, companies, and state government grants through the Judicial Council and the Office of Emergency Services’ Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding. California CASA is pursuing an ambitious vision to ensure that every child in California foster care will have a CASA by their side if they need one. California CASA is one of 49 state associations in the United States and a member of the National CASA/GAL Association for Children.

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