



Meeting with Your Legislators: Tips and Talking Points



Thank you to Texas CASA for sharing this resource with us!

Visits/contacts should be coordinated with your local CASA program.

Visit Preparation

- Learn about your legislator at www.texastribune.org/ directory
- Contact the legislator's district director or scheduler and ask for some dates that work.
- Ideally the visit can happen at the CASA office but if not possible, you'll probably meet at the legislator's office.
- The visit should include several volunteers, the CASA E.D. and board members.
- Plan a rough agenda for your meeting (plan for about 30 minutes)
 - who will start introductions, (name, role in the program, where from)
 - who will tell the CASA story (preferably a volunteer)
 - who will talk about challenges in the system and why CASA volunteers so critical

The Visit Itself

- Introduce yourself/ves, where you live, what you do and how long you've been involved in CASA, how many children you've served
- Thank them for being here to meet with you about CASA. Remind them what CASA does— don't assume they know even if they say they do. Say "As You Know"
- Pick one or two of the themes (attached) to address.
- Tell the CASA story!—short story with sticky (specific and memorable) facts and emotional tugs

Instead of: "I was appointed to represent three children who were removed from home due to neglect and helped them to find a relative to care for them instead of foster care."

Say: "I was appointed to represent three little boys – 2, 4, and 8 – who had been removed from their mother. She was addicted to drugs and slept in her room with the door locked all day. The oldest was missing school and trying to care for the little ones. There was no food in the house and the boys sometimes ate trash or asked neighbors for food. One of the neighbors called CPS and

the children were placed in two different foster homes an hour away from each other when I was appointed. The boys were desperate to be together. The oldest was worried about his little brothers and the two little ones missed their big brother and cried for him. The oldest boy started acting out his frustration and fear and was placed on medications which made him gain 30 pounds and act lethargic. I coordinated visits for the boys and eventually helped to find a great aunt who was willing to take all three boys instead of having them in foster care. I advocated for a medications review and the oldest boy was taken off the medications, lost weight and became himself again. I had to advocate for the summer school he needed to catch up and to get the little ones into pre-school to help with their developmental delays. Now all boys are thriving, and although their mother still struggles with her drug addiction, they are in a safe, loving home with family. Maybe they can have a healthy relationship with their mother someday."

- Make the case for additional volunteers and the funding to support it
 - Children in foster care are our most vulnerable citizens – in the custody of state due to abuse and neglect
 - Even with growth, CASA serving only 49% of children currently in CPS care
 - Our goal is a CASA for every child and have a long way to
 - Localize it with your program's numbers
- Why CASA is a good investment
 - CASA makes a difference and is cost efficient:
 - CASA volunteers are court appointed to one child or set of siblings at a time and work to find them a safe, permanent home as soon as possible;
 - CASA leverages funding through volunteers – each staff supervisor can support up to 30 volunteers, who can work with up to 100 children;
 - CASA advocacy costs \$2,000/year per child v. foster care rates, which are \$2,000 a month per child (does not include related costs like CPS, courts, services, attorneys).

- Offer to be a resource for them on foster care issues.
- Offer to accompany them to visit court to see CASA in action and see what the cases are like.
- Invite them to any upcoming CASA events.
- Let them know that we are developing our legislative agenda and policy ideas and will come back to meet with

them once they are finalized later in 2014

- Ask them if you can count on their support for CASA.