



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

ALASKA CASA



Alaska CASA  
**Volunteer Handbook**

# Table of Contents

|  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Training</b>                          | 1                                   |
| Pre-Service Training                     | 1                                   |
| Continuing Education                     | 1                                   |
| <b>Case Assignment</b>                   | 1                                   |
| Conflict of Interest                     | 2                                   |
| Case Files                               | 2                                   |
| Notification of Assignment               | 2                                   |
| Initial Case Assignment Meeting          | 2                                   |
| Caseload                                 | 2                                   |
| Out of Jurisdiction CASA Volunteers      | 3                                   |
| <b>Case Advocacy</b>                     | 3                                   |
| Attendance of Court Hearings             | 3                                   |
| Communication with GAL & CASA Staff      | 3                                   |
| Email Communications with GAL & Parties  | 3                                   |
| Contact with CASA Youth                  | 4                                   |
| Confidentiality/Duty to Disclose         | 4                                   |
| Scope of Authority                       | 6                                   |
| Conflict Resolution                      | 6                                   |
| Family Contact                           | 6                                   |
| Record Keeping                           | 6                                   |
| Transportation of CASA Children/Youth    | 6                                   |
| Travel with CASA Children/Youth          | 8                                   |
| <b>Volunteer Dismissal/Resignation</b>   | 8                                   |
| Dismissal of a CASA Volunteer            | 8                                   |
| Resignation                              | 9                                   |
| Resignation by Default                   | 9                                   |
| Hold Status                              | 9                                   |
| <b>General Policies &amp; Procedures</b> | <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b> |
| Reports of Abuse & Neglect               | 10                                  |
| Internal Revenue Regulations             | 10                                  |
| Privacy                                  | 10                                  |
| Social Media                             | 11                                  |
| Reimbursement of CASA Volunteer Expenses | 11                                  |
| Volunteer Interactions with the Media    | 11                                  |
| Volunteer Testifying in Court            | 12                                  |
| <b>Program Contact Information</b>       | <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b> |
| Alaska CASA                              | 12                                  |
| Anchorage CASA                           | 12                                  |
| Fairbanks CASA                           | 12                                  |
| Juneau CASA                              | <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b> |
| Valley CASA                              | 12                                  |

# Alaska CASA Program Volunteer Handbook

**Note:** This handbook provides guidelines for helping a CASA volunteer work their case effectively, to follow Alaska CASA policies, and to remember CASA's role in the court system. It is not intended to replace volunteer training. On the contrary, this handbook supplements the training all volunteers receive and assumes the user has a basic understanding of the CASA program. As explicit as these provisions are, they cannot replace discretion and good judgment in the daily conduct of CASA volunteers; nor can they be expected to cover every possible situation. Volunteers are encouraged to actively seek guidance from the assigned GAL and CASA program staff.

## Training

### Pre-Service Training

Pre-Service training is an integral part of preparing an individual to be an effective CASA volunteer and indicates a person's ability to prioritize and follow through on a commitment to becoming a CASA volunteer. Every CASA volunteer must complete pre-service training prior to being assigned to a case. Volunteers who have previously served as a CASA in another state or community may be required to complete pre-service training, or to complete portions of the training, in order to be eligible for case assignment. At a minimum, a transferring CASA volunteer will be required to complete two court observations. Completion of additional training or assignments will be at the discretion of the local program coordinator, taking into account the volunteer's previous experience and training.

- ✓ Each CASA volunteer applicant will be notified of pre-service training dates and times as soon as possible after expressing interest in the program.
- ✓ CASA volunteers are expected to attend all pre-service training sessions.
- ✓ In the case of an unforeseeable emergency, the CASA volunteer should call the program coordinator as soon as possible to explain the circumstances. The CASA volunteer is responsible for working with the program coordinator in completing any assigned make up work in a timely manner.
- ✓ The CASA volunteer will not be assigned a case until all make up work is completed.
- ✓ Exceptions to this policy may be made at the discretion of the program coordinator after discussion with the state director.
- ✓ Completion of pre-service training is part of the screening process and does not guarantee that a volunteer will be assigned a case.

### Continuing Education

National CASA standards require that volunteers complete twelve hours of continuing education per year. This can be accomplished by attending training offered by the CASA program or a community training event that is relevant to the CASA volunteer's case. Training credit may also be given for independent study such as university level classes or reading a relevant book or watching a relevant video. Volunteers are responsible for reporting continuing education activities to their local program coordinator using the Alaska CASA Volunteer Activity Log form found on the Alaska CASA website. Failure to meet continuing education requirements may result in the volunteer's dismissal from the program. Continuing education hours are tracked by calendar year. The number of continuing education hours required for newly trained volunteers will be adjusted (or prorated) based on the time of year the volunteer completed core training.

## Case Assignment

Under Alaska law, the Office of Public Advocacy is the agency responsible for providing child advocacy services for children involved in a court case due to allegations of abuse or neglect (child in need of aid, or CINA case). When the Office of Children's Services decides to file a CINA petition in court, an Office of Public Advocacy staff

or contract GAL is appointed as guardian ad litem for the child. CASA program staff will consult with local GALs about cases that could benefit from the assignment of a CASA volunteer.

Cases to Consider:

- Sibling groups
- Siblings in multiple placements
- Lack of other natural supports for child
- Older youth likely to age out of system

Cases are generally assigned to CASA volunteers before the initial temporary custody/probable cause hearing or as soon afterward as possible. Older cases may be appropriate if there has been a recent change in the treatment plan or placement, but preference is generally given to newer cases.

CASA program staff will contact an available CASA volunteer to briefly describe the case, make sure that no conflict of interest exists and that the CASA volunteer has the time to adequately serve the case.

### Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest occurs when an individual's personal interests – family, friendships, position, financial interests, or social factors – could compromise or could be perceived to have the potential to compromise their judgement, decisions, or actions.

A CASA volunteer cannot be related to any parties involved in their assigned case or be employed in a position that might result in a conflict of interest. A personal relationship with any parent or child in a case would also present a conflict of interest. A conflict of interest exists if the CASA volunteer is an active employee of the Office of Children's Services (OCS), the Attorney General's Office, or the Public Defender Agency. A conflict would also exist if the CASA volunteer is employed by the Tribe that is a party to a case to which the CASA volunteer is assigned. A person cannot be a CASA volunteer if they are a client of any of these agencies or OPA. CASA volunteers who work at private agencies that provide services to clients of OCS or OPA do not necessarily have a conflict of interest – provided they are not associated with the case to which they are assigned as a CASA volunteer. Employment at such an agency should be discussed with the assigned GAL and disclosed to the parties in the case.

CASA staff will conduct a conflict-of-interest check prior to case assignment. A known or potential conflict of interest must be disclosed immediately to CASA staff. If an undisclosed conflict is discovered, the CASA volunteer will be immediately taken off the case. A CASA volunteer may be dismissed from the program for failure to disclose a known or potential conflict of interest prior to case assignment. Any concerns about a potential conflict of interest at any point during case assignment should be discussed with CASA staff and further reviewed with the assigned GAL, if applicable. CASA staff and the assigned GAL will determine whether a conflict exists, whether the GAL should notify the other parties of the conflict, or if another CASA volunteer should be assigned to the case.

CASA volunteers shall not have direct or indirect financial interest in the assets, leases, business transactions or professional services of the program. If a conflict of this nature exists, the CASA volunteer will be dismissed from the program.

CASA volunteers must sign a *Volunteer Code of Conduct* form prior to taking their first case, acknowledging they understand and agree to this policy.

### Case Files

Once a case assignment is accepted, a file is assembled for the CASA volunteer. The file contains legal documents as well as the forms the CASA volunteer will use while working on the case. Subsequent documents about the case that are received by the assigned GAL or CASA staff will be copied and sent to the CASA volunteer. **It is the CASA volunteer's responsibility to keep the case file secure at all times since it contains confidential information. The case file must be kept private and inaccessible to anyone other**

than the assigned CASA volunteer. All case related communications and the case file must be returned to the CASA office within 3 days of case closure, case dismissal, or any other reason the CASA volunteer is no longer assigned to the case. The case file and all case related information obtained and generated by the CASA volunteer is property of the State of Alaska, Office of Public Advocacy.

### Notification of Assignment

CASA program staff sends notice to all legal parties and the court that a CASA volunteer has been assigned. This serves as an introduction for the volunteer to the various participants in the case.

### Initial Case Assignment Meeting

After the CASA volunteer accepts the case CASA program staff will notify the assigned GAL to arrange an initial case assignment meeting with the volunteer. The purpose of this initial meeting is to get acquainted, exchange contact information, discuss communication expectations, generate the initial case “to do” list, and review important program reminders.

### Caseload

A CASA volunteer’s caseload shall be limited to no more than two (2) cases (sibling groups) at a time unless an exception has been granted by the CASA program coordinator. A caseload exception form must be completed by CASA program staff and must specify the justification for the exception. Under no circumstances shall a CASA volunteer’s caseload exceed five (5) cases at one time.

### Out of Jurisdiction Placements

CASA volunteers can be assigned to children/youth who are placed outside of their legal jurisdiction of their CINA case. For these children/youth, the role of a CASA volunteer is determined by what is included in the request from the GAL.

## Case Advocacy

### Attendance of Court Hearings

It is an expectation that CASA volunteers will participate in court hearings either in-person or telephonically. If you are not able to participate in the court hearing, please let your assigned guardian ad litem (GAL) know as soon as possible.

### Communication with GAL & CASA Staff

Each CASA volunteer is teamed on a case with the assigned GAL. Regular contact with the GAL is very important. CASA volunteers are expected to send summary notes of all home visits or other contact with the child to the GAL in a timely fashion. Notes from any case-related meeting the CASA volunteer attends without the GAL should also be sent to the GAL.

It is important to be in contact with the assigned GAL prior to every court hearing to discuss recommendations concerning the case. The GAL will review all written reports prior to filing with the court. GALs should not alter reports or recommendations without first discussing the proposed changes with the CASA volunteer.

Any letter or report from the CASA volunteer **must** be reviewed and co-signed by the assigned GAL. An attorney must sign legal documents such as motions and petitions. CASA volunteers do not directly file any reports or documents with the court; this will be completed by the assigned GAL or CASA program staff.

All CASA volunteers have access to legal advice related to CINA matters through the assigned GAL or an OPA civil attorney.

CASA program staffers are also available to provide general consultation should the assigned GAL be unavailable. In addition, the program coordinator will communicate regularly with volunteers, often via email. CASA volunteers should always feel free to contact staff as needed.

### Email Communications with GAL & Parties

Communicating via email is a common tool used in your CASA volunteer casework. Keep in mind when sending email communications to other parties in the case—particularly to the assigned OCS worker—that your communication may be made available to others through the discovery process, so your tone and language should be professional and objective. **When referring to a CASA youth in email communications between CASA volunteers and GALs or any other professionals—including social workers and attorneys—use only the youth’s initials in both the subject line and in the body of the email.**

**CASA volunteers must have or establish a confidential email account that cannot be accessed by anyone else for CASA-related communications.** Your email communications should reflect a professional image, so if your email address is highly personal or otherwise not appropriate for a business setting (e.g. lovetopartyak@----.com) you may be asked to establish a new account for use in your work as a CASA volunteer. There are many free and easy-to-use email providers (Gmail, etc.) to choose from. Examples of an acceptable email address include: CASAJane@---.com, or JohnSmithAK@---.com. *An email address used only for your CASA volunteer work not only maintains case confidentiality, it also helps to keep your personal contact information private.*

### Contact with CASA Youth

CASA volunteers are expected to maintain regular contact with their CASA child(ren). In general, this means a minimum of twice monthly contact.

Regular face-to-face contact is essential so that CASA volunteers can develop rapport and trust with their CASA children, and to obtain firsthand knowledge as to whether the child’s needs are being met. CASA volunteers should observe their CASA children in a variety of settings such as school (make sure the child is agreeable to a school visit), home or foster care, during family contact, and in the community. Depending upon the age and placement of the child, some contact may occur by telephone or email.

Some CASA youth may request contact with their CASA volunteer through social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.). To ensure the safety of CASA youth and CASA volunteers, contact via social media is not allowed. An exception can be made for youth to communicate with their assigned CASA volunteers through Facebook Messenger. If Facebook Messenger is used to communicate with youth, the CASA volunteer must consider this communication as part of the case file, just as they would text messages and emails.

If legitimate circumstances prevent the CASA volunteer from maintaining contact with the child at least every 30 days, the volunteer must work with CASA program staff to document the reasons an exception should be made to the minimum contact standard.

CASA volunteers sometimes choose to take a CASA child on an outing such as going to the public library, the zoo, or going out for a snack. The purpose of such outings is to develop rapport and trust with the child in order to be a more effective advocate for an individual child’s particular needs. **CASA volunteers never take CASA children to the volunteer’s home, on an overnight outing, or to any home that is not the child’s placement.**

Friends of Alaska CASA (FAC), our nonprofit partner, may provide passes and coupons for various community activities; check with your local program coordinator for details and availability. FAC may also provide limited reimbursement for activities with your CASA children. **CASA volunteers shall not include their own family members in any contacts/outings with CASA children.**

It is inappropriate for a CASA volunteer to give CASA children expensive gifts or money. A small token to acknowledge a CASA child’s birthday or other important occasion is allowed.

*Any deviations from these contact standards should be discussed with and approved by the CASA program coordinator in advance.*

As stated above, the purpose of outings with a CASA child is to develop rapport and trust in order to be a more effective advocate for an individual child's particular needs. This being the case and due to liability issues, CASA volunteers are not to take children who are not assigned to that volunteer on an outing including siblings, foster siblings, family, and friends. This applies even when asked by the placement, an OCS worker, a provider, or the CASA child.

CASA volunteers are encouraged to consider proper safeguard behaviors while interacting with CASA children. Safeguards help ensure the safety of both the CASA child and the CASA volunteer. Safeguards include but are not limited to going on public outings, bringing other assigned siblings on outings, leaving doors open when visiting with the child, etc.

Should a Report of Harm or an accusation be made against a CASA volunteer, the following steps will be taken.

1. The CASA volunteer will be put on a temporary hold from all assigned cases while OCS conducts an investigation.
2. The CASA program coordinator will meet with the CASA volunteer. The CASA volunteer will be given a letter stating the reason for the temporary hold.
3. The CASA volunteer is to have no contact with the CASA child or conduct any case activities until the outcome of the investigation is determined.
4. If the Report of Harm is substantiated, the CASA volunteer will be dismissed from their role.
5. If the Report of Harm is unsubstantiated, the CASA volunteer will meet with the CASA program coordinator and possibly the GAL to discuss if continuing to serve on the case is appropriate.

Please note: OCS does not always release information surrounding the Report of Harm. It is possible that not a lot of information will be known regarding the accusation.

### Confidentiality/Duty to Disclose

CINA cases are confidential, and information obtained in such cases normally cannot be released for any purpose without prior court approval. Under state law, certain CINA hearings are open to the public. Records, however, remain confidential. CASA volunteers must sign a *Confidentiality Agreement* prior to taking their first case. The duty of confidentiality extends even after a case is closed.

Any violation of this policy by a CASA volunteer, intentionally or unintentionally, will be reviewed by the Program Coordinator in consultation with the State Director and may result in the volunteer's dismissal.

- Volunteers must adhere to strict confidentiality with respect to children and families' rights to privacy regarding personal information.
- Disclosure or verification of case information shall not be made to anyone who does not have a professional reason for receiving such information (ex: teacher, provider, foster parent, etc.). Information disclosed should only be done when necessary to advocate for the best interest of the assigned child/youth.
- No information shall be released to anyone not authorized to receive it, without the express written and dated consent of the party.
- Confidential information shall only be shared with professional staff at the CASA program/Office of Public Advocacy, Office of Children's Services, the court, and other sworn in CASA volunteers for case staffing purposes.
- Discussions of case-related material are not to be held in hallways, elevators, or other public places.
- It is the CASA volunteer's job to transmit the information collected to the GAL and, when applicable, to the court.
- No one outside of CASA staff may have access to a CASA volunteer's records without a court order.
- Any confidential materials received from another individual or agency may not be disclosed to anyone outside the GAL or CASA staff, except by court order or written consent of the party involved.
- CASA volunteers have a duty to immediately disclose suspected child abuse or neglect to their supervising GAL.
- CASA volunteers have a duty to immediately disclose knowledge/information that a party may harm themselves or others to their supervising GAL.

## Photo Confidentiality

To protect and preserve confidentiality for all CASA children involved with our programs, you are expected to adhere to the following:

1. CASA volunteers may take photos of the child to whom they are assigned when the child requests to have pictures of themselves with their CASA.
2. Photos of CASA children are never to be used for public distribution or on social media.
3. A photo of the CASA child may only be attached to an officially filed court report.
4. It is mandatory that any electronic photo files be deleted from the CASA volunteer's camera, phone, computer or any similar device immediately after being used in an official court report.

## Scope of Authority

It is important for CASA volunteers to remember—as well as to communicate to the children, families, foster parents and service providers with whom you will work—that GALs and CASA volunteers do not have decision-making authority in CINA cases to which they're assigned. As child advocates, we have *influence* into the decisions that are ultimately made by those with that authority: the court and OCS. CASA volunteers therefore do not have authority to:

- make placement decisions for children in custody
- make arrangements for visitation between children and parents
- sign permission for children to receive services, treatment, or to attend school or extracurricular activities.

## Conflict Resolution

There may be times when a conflict occurs between the CASA volunteer and another party in the case. The volunteer should attempt to directly resolve the conflict, but if this is not possible, the volunteer should seek assistance from the assigned GAL or program coordinator to do so.

If an irreconcilable conflict exists between the CASA volunteer and the assigned GAL, either individual should contact the program coordinator immediately. The program coordinator and the GAL's supervisor will intervene and assist in resolving the conflict between the GAL and the CASA volunteer.

Complaints about a CASA volunteer should be directed to the CASA program coordinator and/or state director for investigation. The results of the complaint investigation, as well as any corrective action necessary, will be made available to the CASA volunteer.

## Family Contact

Supervision of approved family contact is the responsibility of the Office of Children's Services. It is appropriate for CASA volunteers to observe parent-child interactions, and volunteers are encouraged to observe family contact at least once. In rare instances, and *only with the permission of the assigned GAL*, CASA volunteers may supervise family contact, but must follow OCS's family contact policies. However: a CASA volunteer shall never be required to supervise family contact. **Under no circumstances shall a CASA volunteer make or approve arrangements for family contact.**

## Record Keeping

Every contact – whether by phone, email, or in person – that the CASA volunteer has with anyone regarding the volunteer's assigned CINA case should be documented. Detailed notes should also be kept of all court hearings and case meetings regarding the case. Discussions with the assigned GAL should also be documented in the file. Careful documentation is critical, and should include the date of contact, name of contact, type of contact, others who were present, and notes about the information gathered and follow-up action required. **Audio or video recordings of case contacts are not permitted.**

## Transportation of CASA Children/Youth



A memorandum of agreement exists between the Office of Public Advocacy (OPA) and the Office of Children's Services (OCS) allowing CASA volunteers to transport children in state's custody. A CASA volunteer may be approved to transport a CASA child who is a client of the Office of Public Advocacy in their personal automobile in the course of their duties.

Transportation of clients to appointments, court, school, or meetings is the primary responsibility of the client's caretaker or OCS. Each CASA volunteer shall determine their own willingness to transport a CASA child in each individual case. ***A CASA volunteer shall never be required to transport a CASA child. CASA volunteers are not allowed to transport the child's family members, or any other person related to the case.***

The State of Alaska Division of Risk Management will protect the volunteer providing volunteer guardian ad litem services as it would a regular state employee if the CASA volunteer has a current VSA (Volunteer Service Agreement) on file. This means that the state will respond to liability claims asserted against a volunteer that arise out of reasonable and prudent conduct in performance of the duties assigned to them. However, the state will deny liability protection for gross or intentional misconduct by employees or volunteers. This coverage and limitation apply during the activity of transportation of CASA children in a volunteer's or employee's automobile. The state does not provide collision or comprehensive insurance coverage for the volunteer's auto. The State of Alaska is self-insured through the Division of Risk Management and provides insurance coverage (liability and worker's compensation but not vehicle or property coverage) for CASA volunteers as long as the volunteer is acting in good faith and within the scope of his/her volunteer duties.

The length of service covered by the VSA is one calendar year. The Division requires that a new VSA is signed annually by each volunteer. You will be sent a new VSA at the end of each year that you must sign and return to the CASA office before January 1. *Keep in mind that failure to sign and return the VSA in a timely manner leaves you unprotected, as the state will not cover anyone without a current VSA on file.*

If a volunteer plans on transporting children in their own vehicle the program coordinator will ensure that the volunteer meets the minimum requirements for approval to transport and will obtain copies of the required documentation to place in the volunteer's file.

**If you choose to transport CASA children, it is extremely important to consider their safety as well as your own safety and liability. The following guidelines must be adhered to when transporting CASA children.**

*Prior to Transporting CASA Children-*

- CASA volunteers must possess and provide a copy of a valid state driver's license to the CASA office.
- CASA volunteers must possess personal automobile insurance that meets the minimum state requirements and provide a copy verifying current auto insurance coverage to the CASA office.
- CASA volunteers must sign an authorization for the CASA program to perform a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) check.
- CASA volunteers who have received two (2) or more traffic citations (moving or non-moving) in the last three (3) months or who have been at fault in one (1) or more vehicular accidents in the last twelve (12) months are prohibited from transporting CASA children.
- Volunteers who have been convicted of DWI or DUI (Driving While Intoxicated or Driving Under the Influence) within the last five (5) years may not transport a CASA child, unless approved in advance by Alaska CASA/OPA administration.

*When Transporting CASA Children-*

**DRIVERS:**

- CASA volunteers transporting a CASA child shall follow ALL Alaska traffic laws.
- CASA volunteers are responsible for the passengers in their vehicle. The driver should not begin to transport any person(s) until such person(s) have complied with the safety guidelines detailed below for passengers:

## PASSENGERS:

- All passengers must wear seatbelts.
- Children under the age of 13 should ride in the back seat.
- CASA volunteers must abide by current child passenger safety requirements for appropriate types and use of restraints. Visit the state Division of Public Health Injury Prevention website on Child Passenger Safety for details.

It is each volunteer's responsibility to safely transport CASA children. If you have more than one (1) child that requires a child safety restraint, do not transport the additional child or children unless you can borrow or provide the appropriate safety restraint for each additional child.

### Travel with CASA Children/Youth

Occasionally CASA volunteers may be asked to assist with a case by accompanying their CASA child on out-of-town travel (to visit a potential relative placement, to attend a medical appointment, etc). A CASA volunteer may also seek to visit a child who has moved to another community. A CASA volunteer is never required to travel, but if they are willing and it would be in the child's best interest, the following must occur:

1. The CASA volunteer should discuss the purpose of the trip with the assigned GAL and determine if it falls within the role of a CASA volunteer.
2. The CASA program coordinator should be informed and given details about the travel arrangements.
3. Payment for the trip must either be through another source such as OCS, or the CASA program must submit a request to the OPA director to seek approval prior to the trip.
4. The CASA program coordinator should get a copy of the CASA volunteer's proposed travel itinerary and submit it to the state director.

## Volunteer Dismissal/Resignation

### Dismissal of a CASA Volunteer

CASA volunteers are expected to perform their role in accordance with their job description and these policies. The CASA volunteer is expected to be completely familiar with job performance expectations, written CASA program policies and the assigned GAL's guidance to adequately perform the CASA volunteer role. Administrative policy is to aid and facilitate the work of the volunteer and to openly discuss any problems and concerns with the volunteer, and most importantly to establish and maintain the integrity and credibility of the CASA program.

Corrective action may be taken if the volunteer's work is unsatisfactory. Corrective action is within the discretion of the program coordinator and may include:

- Additional supervision
- Reassignment
- Retraining
- Referral to another volunteer position

Dismissal of a volunteer from performing direct case advocacy services with the CASA program is at the discretion of the Program Coordinator, after consultation with the State Director. The Director and/or Deputy Director of OPA will be consulted as necessary when dismissing a volunteer.

A CASA volunteer may be dismissed from the program for the following reasons including but not limited to:

- ✓ failure to demonstrate an ability to effectively carry out assigned duties

- ✓ failure to complete required core training or continuing education
- ✓ inadequate utilization of professional guidance from the assigned GAL
- ✓ violating a program policy, court rule or law
- ✓ late filing of court reports and/or tardiness for court
- ✓ behaviors or attitudes of the CASA volunteer that are contrary to the best interests of the CASA children and/or the CASA program
- ✓ being under investigation for child abuse/neglect or other behavior that would pose a risk to children
- ✓ taking CASA children to the CASA volunteer's home – this is prohibited
- ✓ giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling
- ✓ giving money or expensive gifts to the child or family
- ✓ engaging in ex-parte communication with the court
- ✓ falsifying or misrepresenting facts during the application/screening process

A CASA volunteer shall be dismissed from the program for the following reasons:

- ✓ violations of confidentiality
- ✓ disclosure of case information to the press/media
- ✓ emotional or physical abuse of a child
- ✓ any sexual contact with a child
- ✓ failure to follow the direct instructions of the assigned GAL or CASA program staff
- ✓ taking action without program or court approval that endangers the child or is outside the role or powers of the CASA program
- ✓ existence of a conflict of interest which cannot be resolved
- ✓ abandonment of the CASA volunteer role without reasonable notice to the CASA program coordinator or assigned GAL

## Resignation

A CASA volunteer who finds it necessary to voluntarily resign from the program should give sufficient prior notice to the assigned GAL and to CASA program staff. The volunteer should develop a plan in consultation with the GAL to tell the child that the CASA volunteer is leaving the program. Whenever possible, an exit interview with resigning CASA volunteers will be conducted. Written notice of withdrawal will be sent to all parties and the court. **All case files and CASA identification must be returned to the CASA program / Office of Public Advocacy within a week of resigning.**

## Resignation by Default

A volunteer who has not been in recent contact with CASA program staff or the assigned GAL shall be contacted by the program coordinator in order to check in with the CASA and the case. If the CASA is communicating doubt or reluctance in continuing as a CASA volunteer the program coordinator will brainstorm possible reasons and solutions with the CASA. If after the discussion the CASA still feels unsettled about continuing on the case the program coordinator will offer the option of going on hold status or leaving the program. The volunteer will be asked to return his/her CASA ID badge and any case file(s) in his/her possession to the CASA program office. A CASA volunteer removed from the program who wishes to be reinstated into the program shall be subject to the requirements outlined in the next section.

## Hold Status

If a CASA volunteer decides s/he needs to take a break and has an active case, s/he will be encouraged to continue until the case is resolved. If the CASA volunteer wants to take a break but does not want to quit the program, s/he will be put on "Hold" status and will continue to receive all program mailings. CASA volunteers are expected to attend continuing education sessions and other CASA program functions while on Hold status. CASA

volunteers are encouraged to call or e-mail the program coordinator with updates concerning their circumstances and availability.

Periodically, CASA program staff will contact the CASA volunteer on hold status to see if s/he is ready for a new case, interested in working on an out-of-jurisdiction case assignment or if s/he can help the program in other ways. If there is no contact with a volunteer on Hold status for a six-month period, the program coordinator will write a letter explaining that the CASA volunteer will be removed from the program unless s/he contacts CASA program staff immediately.

CASA volunteers may reactivate at a future time if their previous CASA work was satisfactory. Local program staff will assess each volunteer to determine what may be needed before the returning CASA volunteer receives a new case. Additional training or screening may be required.

## General Policies & Procedures

### Reports of Abuse & Neglect

Any disclosures of allegations of abuse or neglect by a CASA child to a CASA volunteer should be immediately reported to the assigned GAL, program coordinator, or state director. The report will then be forwarded to the Office of Children's Services (OCS). If the CASA volunteer cannot reach the assigned GAL or another Office of Public Advocacy staff person, the volunteer must determine if the child is in immediate danger of harm. If the child is at immediate risk, the CASA volunteer must immediately notify the Office of Children's Services or, if unable to contact OCS, the police. For example: the CASA volunteer is talking with a child and the child discloses that she was sexually abused a year ago by an uncle who lives outside of Alaska. The child is not in immediate danger, as the perpetrator has no current access to the child. The CASA volunteer should document this disclosure and report it to the assigned GAL. By contrast, if the child disclosed that her mother's live-in boyfriend molested her the previous day, she would be at immediate risk of harm and action must be taken even if the assigned GAL cannot be reached.

**Disclosures of abuse or neglect must be reported to the Office of Children's Services.** A CASA volunteer cannot promise a child that such a disclosure can be kept a secret between the volunteer and the child.

### Internal Revenue Regulations

With ever-changing tax laws, the ability to deduct expenses incurred while volunteering as a CASA is unclear. In the past, costs for transportation, meals and other out-of-pocket expenses while performing services for a charitable organization have been deductible. CASA volunteers are advised to contact the Internal Revenue Service or a tax professional each year for information as to the eligibility of these deductions. The IRS has a publication entitled "Income Tax Deductions for Contributions" which may be of assistance. You may also try this link: <http://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc506.html> for information.

### Privacy

Your privacy is important to us; therefore, we will not sell, rent, or give your name or address to anyone with one exception: your name and email address will be provided to the Office of Children's Services to facilitate the agency's ability to notify you about various administrative meetings regarding your assigned case.

Promoting CASA and the outstanding work of our volunteers is an important part of our public relations activities. Images are used on a variety of platforms to enhance the profile of the Alaska CASA program and to educate the public. At the time you applied to become a CASA volunteer you were asked to sign the following Image Release:

*I hereby authorize and consent Alaska CASA or the CASA program to use and reproduce photographs and any other media taken of me for printed promotional material, educational activities, exhibitions or for any other use for the benefit of the program, including, but not limited to, online social media communications such as postings on Facebook and Twitter. I understand that I may revoke this authorization at any time by notifying the CASA program in writing.*

If you did not sign the release at the time of your application, you may choose to do so in the future by contacting your local program coordinator.

## Social Media

Social media, when used appropriately, can be a powerful tool to increase awareness, support and sense of community for child advocates. It is important that those who choose to engage in social media understand what is recommended, expected, required, and prohibited regarding CASA-related topics. Our ability to serve children depends on the trust and support of our community and it is critical that we handle the confidential information entrusted to us responsibly.

**When you engage in social media and online communication, you become a public figure that is associated with Alaska CASA. As such, you have a responsibility to help protect the CASA organization and the children we serve.** One negative statement made by a person representing him/herself as a CASA volunteer can destroy years of progress devoted to building positive relationships with OCS, service providers, the judiciary and the public. Please see Contact with CASA Youth section for information on social media and working with children/youth.

Volunteers with Alaska CASA are prohibited from:

- × Posting identifying information regarding any child welfare case
- × Posting confidential information regarding any child welfare case
- × Case-related communication between any legal parties to the case via social networking
- × Posting inappropriate material
- × Providing links to inappropriate websites
- × Posting undesirable comments, reference or pictures anywhere on the web where the posting directly or indirectly refers to the Alaska CASA program, its local programs, or its staff
- × Misrepresenting the views expressed by Alaska CASA

Inappropriate material shall be defined as postings, depictions or descriptions of:

- × illicit substances and/or their paraphernalia
- × underage drinking
- × harassing, hostile, false or confidential information,
- × any acts that violate local, state, and federal laws, statutes, rules, regulations and Alaska CASA policies
- × Prejudice or discriminatory statements against individuals, businesses, government agencies, or groups

Volunteers found to be in violation of this policy may be sanctioned at the discretion of the Alaska CASA state director.

## Reimbursement of CASA Volunteer Expenses

Alaska CASA does not have resources for reimbursement of expenses incurred by the CASA volunteer during the course of his or her duties. Costs of transportation, parking and childcare must be borne entirely by the volunteer. If long distance phone calls are necessary to fully investigate a case, you may use a phone at the OPA offices or contact your local program coordinator to request a calling card. Long distance phone calls placed from the CASA volunteer's home or work telephone will not be reimbursed by the program. Our nonprofit support partner, Friends of Alaska CASA, may have funds to assist a volunteer with costs related to continuing education and travel or other costs related to case duties. Volunteers should contact their local program coordinator or visit the Friends of Alaska CASA website, [www.friendsofalaskacasa.org](http://www.friendsofalaskacasa.org) for more information.

## Volunteer Interactions with the Media

The credibility of the Alaska CASA program is based upon the CASA volunteer's unbiased, independent stance. The CASA volunteer must independently assess each child's unique circumstances in formulating his or her

recommendations. The CASA volunteer must never use the CASA program or his/her relationship to the Office of Public Advocacy to express personal views. If the CASA volunteer becomes an advocate for an issue or particular cause beyond his/her CASA volunteer role, he or she must not be identified as a volunteer of the Office of Public Advocacy / Alaska CASA program.

Occasionally a case in which a CASA volunteer is involved receives a great deal of media attention. While CINA petitions involve confidential information, most CINA court hearings are open, and criminal cases are a matter of public record. If the media contacts the CASA volunteer, s/he must discuss the matter with the CASA program coordinator and the assigned guardian ad litem prior to discussing **any** aspect of the case with the media. The CASA volunteer should **never** contact the media directly in order to attract attention to a case, even if it appears to the volunteer that a serious injustice has been done. Violation of this policy will result in the immediate dismissal of the CASA volunteer from the program.

### Volunteer Testifying in Court

CASA volunteers are subject to the same court rules as GALs, this includes testifying in court. All duties of a CASA volunteer should be conducted in a way that would not compel them to be called to testify. For specifics on CASA volunteers and testifying, reference CINA Rule 11(h).

## Program Contact Information

### Alaska CASA

State Director: Joy Rigby  
Phone: 907-269-3513  
Fax: 907-269-3535  
Email: [AlaskaCASA@alaska.gov](mailto:AlaskaCASA@alaska.gov)  
Address: 900 West 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501

### Anchorage CASA

CASA Program Coordinator: Coming Soon!  
Phone: 907-269-3510  
Fax: 907-269-3535  
Email: [AnchorageCASA@alaska.gov](mailto:AnchorageCASA@alaska.gov)  
Address: 900 West 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 599, Anchorage, AK 99501

### Fairbanks CASA

CASA Program Coordinator: Kaelan Kiernan  
Phone: 907-451-2812  
Fax: 907-451-3934  
Email: [FairbanksCASA@alaska.gov](mailto:FairbanksCASA@alaska.gov)  
Address: 100 Cushman Street, Suite 502, Fairbanks, AK 99701

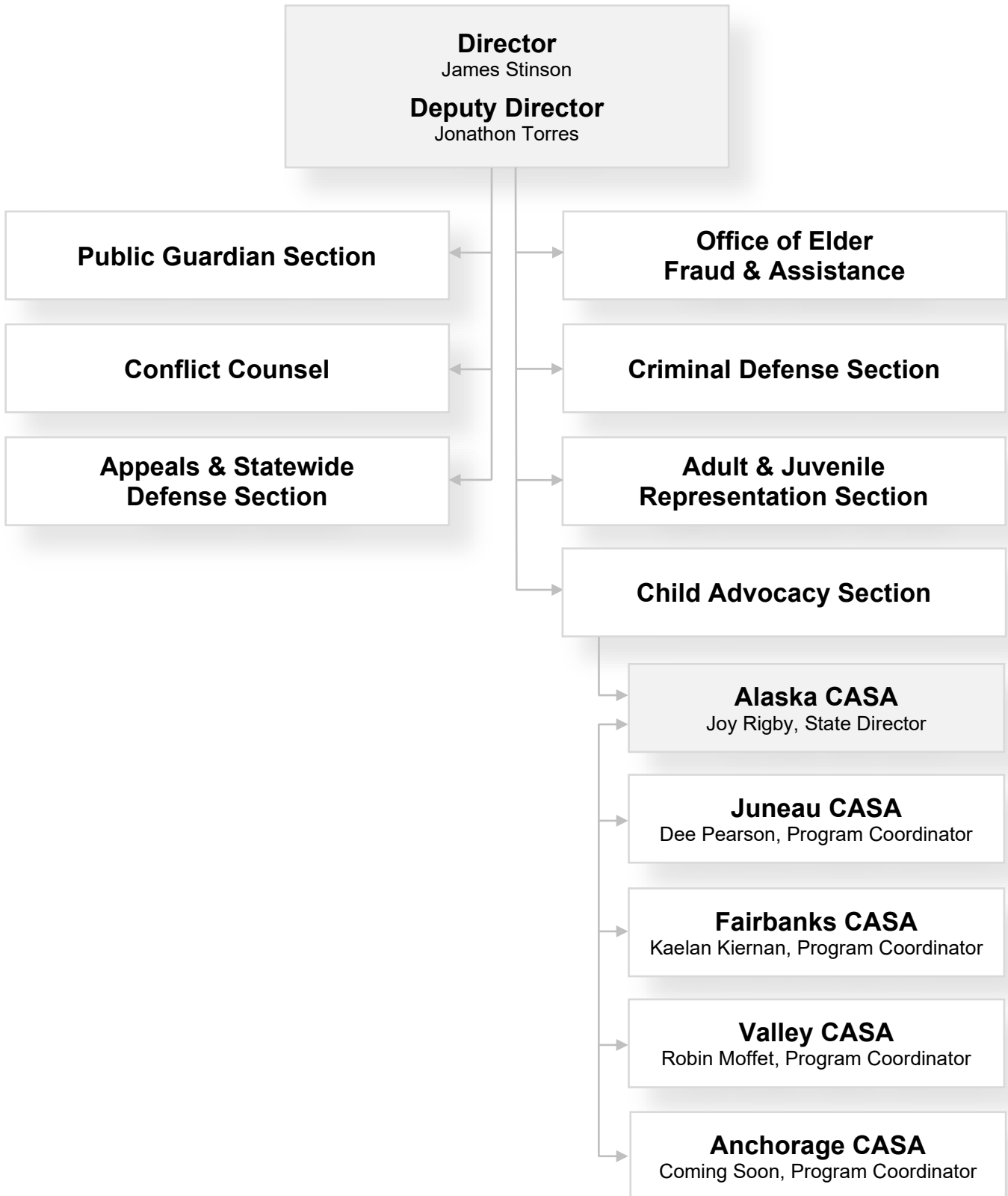
### Juneau CASA

CASA Program Coordinator: Dee Pearson  
Phone: 907-465-4679  
Fax: 907-465-3645  
Email: [SoutheastCASA@alaska.gov](mailto:SoutheastCASA@alaska.gov)  
Physical Address: 150 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 120, Juneau, AK 99811-0225  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 10225, Juneau, AK 99811-0225

### Valley CASA

CASA Program Coordinator: Robin Moffet  
Phone: 907-707-1743  
Fax: 907-707-1754  
Email: [ValleyCASA@alaska.gov](mailto:ValleyCASA@alaska.gov)  
Address: 515 East Dahlia Street, Suite 130, Palmer, AK 33645

# Office of Public Advocacy



## Mission

Alaska CASA works to ensure a safe and stable future for our most vulnerable youth by mobilizing community volunteers to provide focused advocacy to children and youth in the child welfare system.

## Vision

Alaska CASA, through a diverse and culturally responsive network of staff, volunteers, and partners, provides focused advocacy to children and youth in the child welfare system. We aspire to turn compassion into action so that...

- ...all children and youth in Alaska who are in the child welfare system have a caring and consistent adult in their life;
- ...our community members know how to support and care for children and youth in the child welfare system;
- ...every child and youth in Alaska feels safe and connected to a family;
- ...all children and youth in the child welfare system find support, feel heard, and received needed services; and
- ...in child welfare cases, Judges have recent and relevant information available about each child and youth to help guide their decisions.

## Values

**A child's right to be safe:** We believe that every child and youth has the right to be safe. Only first through being safe will they have a chance to thrive.

**The dignity and worth of every child and youth:** We protect, nurture, and advocate for children and youth through personalized, culturally responsive advocacy and care.

**Voluntary Service:** We honor the dedication and giving heart of each of our CASA volunteers. Our volunteers provide their time and talents to children and youth in our communities who need a caring and consistent adult to walk alongside them during a very difficult time in life. We recognize that this takes both courage and bravery from each volunteer.

**Program Excellence:** We operate with authenticity, integrity, and courage – striving for program excellence through continuous improvements.

**Culture:** We understand and respect that each person is guided by our own set of beliefs, values, and experiences. We believe that each child and youth served by our program deserves to have their culture recognized and preserved as they make their way through the child welfare system.

**Diversity:** We respect and embrace diversity among our staff, volunteers, community partners, the children and youth we serve, and their families. We make no discrimination as to nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, cultural background, physical or mental ability, political opinions, or sexual orientation.

**Collaboration:** We seek to foster collaboration among systems, communities, and volunteers to improve outcomes and to mitigate the impact that going through the child welfare system might have on children and youth.