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Judiciary Committee--CASA
December 05, 2012

[CASA]

The Committee on Judiciary met at 11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, December 5, 2012, in Room 1113 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on results of the grant program for CASA, authorized under LB463. Senators present: Brad Ashford, Chairperson; Steve Lathrop, Vice Chairperson; Colby Coash; Brenda Council; and Amanda McGill. Senators absent: Burke Harr; Tyson Larson; and Scott Lautenbaugh.

SENATOR ASHFORD: Hi. Good morning.

CORRIE KIELTY: (Exhibit 1) Hi. Good morning. My name is Corrie Kielty, spelled K-i-e-l-t-y. I am the executive director for Nebraska CASA. I want to thank the committee for your time this morning and giving us this time to let us talk about what we've done with the CASA Fund. I've provided you with an executive summary that sort of details everything that we've done, as well as a map, and I'm going to briefly go through what's in that. And then Stephanie Miller is here and she is the director of the Lincoln County CASA, and she's going to let you know what they've done with a brand new program that was started up because of this funding. As you know, CASA recruits, trains, and manages volunteers assigned by judges to speak for children in the court system. CASA volunteers work with children and provide regular reports to judges in cases of abuse and neglect. The first CASA program was established in Nebraska in 1986. There are currently 22 Nebraska CASA programs and they're serving 37 counties. In fiscal year 2011-2012 there was \$100,000 provided in this fund and \$200,000 provided in the current fiscal year. The court keeps \$10,000 per year to administer the fund. Of the remaining funds, Nebraska CASA has recruited and trained more volunteers to serve the children, provided additional mandated training to volunteers and program staff, expanded CASA into additional Nebraska counties, and is working with UNO School of Social Work to obtain better data outcomes for our program, making it more cost-efficient and effective. Eighty percent of this fund is

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provided to local programs through a grant. These grants subsidize the recruitment and training of new volunteers. New volunteers must have 30 hours of training before they can serve children, per Nebraska statute as well as national CASA standards. Current volunteers need to have 12 hours of training per year in order to continue serving children in the court system. The additional training provided through this fund increased the amount of volunteers that could serve children over the last year by 20 percent already. That means 20 percent more children could be served because of this fund. The grants have also allowed us to expand two local CASA programs. CASA of South Central Nebraska is now serving Webster County in addition to Adams, Clay, and Nuckolls. Seward County CASA is now serving Jefferson County and they've changed their name to Southeast Nebraska CASA, with plans to expand into at least two more counties. New local programs are also being funded. Cheyenne County started their own CASA program. Their director is now on board and she's currently training her first class of volunteers. Stephanie is going to talk to you about what's happening in Lincoln County. And in addition, Saunders County was asked to reestablish a program that wasn't in place anymore. They did that just prior to this fund starting. But what happened through the fund is they've trained three classes of volunteers already, so they have been able to serve children much more quickly than they would have without this fund. This year the local program directors themselves set the fund for...set the formula for this grant funding, so they met, they decided how this was going to work. And the way it works is every program gets a set amount for recruiting volunteers. On top of that, they project how many volunteers they're going to have that are current and need training, and then how many new volunteers are they going to recruit that need training. Based upon their projections, they can receive funding for a certain amount per each...per volunteer that they project. In addition to that, we provided funding to expanding and new programs. So if a program was started January 1, 2010, or after, or had plans to expand into neighboring counties, they could receive funding for start-up costs and for expansion costs. As I stated earlier, the number of trained volunteers directly correlates to the number of children CASA can serve. We're already seeing the numbers expanding, based upon last year's funding. In the last fiscal year we served

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1,247 children. There were 1,444 neglected or abused children on a waiting list for a CASA volunteer. This year, we have data through the first quarter, so end of September, and we were already serving 945 children in the first quarter. Unfortunately, there's 1,660 children on that waiting list at the end of that quarter. And as I said, not only are we growing the services but we're making the services more effective through this fund, not much of this fund but a little bit. We have a contract and a partnership with University of Nebraska-Omaha Grace Abbott School of Social Work, and they're doing several things. They've taken five years of prior statistical data for all Nebraska CASA programs. They reviewed it and they published it in reports, providing trends that can be used to enhance local programs' work, their funding, and the recruitment of volunteers. They developed a logic model. This is a key component for all programs for tracking our success as well as making it more efficient and cost-effective. The program is also working to ensure that our expansion is as effective as possible. The board has established a goal of having a CASA volunteer for every child that needs one in Nebraska by the year 2020. Through a needs assessment in counties that have no CASA program, researching current statistics and trends regarding abused and neglected children, surveying judges and county attorneys, UNO has provided a synopsis of information helping our board make the most effective decisions regarding CASA's time line for expansion. Nebraska CASA's strategic plan will be enhanced to better meet the specific needs of individual counties based on that data. Over the past year, the School of Social Work has also reviewed the current statistical information that we gather. Currently, we look at numbers--numbers of kids served, numbers of volunteers, those types of things--but what we'd like to have is specific data for each case. So, for example, I can tell you that I know kids find permanent placement faster when they have a CASA volunteer. I know that because of state research, because of national research. But I don't know specifically per case that we have in Nebraska how does that turn out. So what they've done is developed a tool that, as of December 1, we started piloting in four local programs that will give us that data on each case. So that's something that I'm really excited about. As I said, we currently serve 37 counties, and I put that on a map, and then that map also shows you where the new CASA programs

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are that were started because of this fund--four new CASA programs in the last two years. The last thing I want to talk about is that cost-effectiveness of the CASA program. As I said, there's national studies. There's also some good studies here in Nebraska, including one conducted by Creighton University looking at Douglas County CASA. They looked at the cost analysis to the Department of Health and Human Services based upon children who were assigned a CASA volunteer. A child served by a CASA volunteer spends an average of four to five months fewer in care than a foster child without a CASA volunteer. If every child had a CASA volunteer, that reduced time in care is estimated at \$12.5 million per month or \$50 million to \$62.4 million per year for the state of Nebraska. Now this is a 2009 study using 2009, not current, costs, and they also only looked at the costs of housing foster care children, not any of the other services the state of Nebraska might pay for. Children in care with CASA volunteers also have fewer placement changes. These children reenter the system at a very low rate--1.4 to 9 percent. Children without a CASA volunteer average reentry into the system at a rate of 16 percent, so it is much higher. If you look at all the national data in the national studies, there are even studies that show nationally these kids have half of the recidivism rate of a child without a CASA volunteer. And what we know and what makes it kind of hard, and that's why there's a range, is that these kids are the most difficult cases. A judge says, wow, this is a complicated case so I really need to assign a volunteer to this case, so that makes it kind of hard to compare. I have been the CASA director now for one month, 32 days, and I'm very honored to be the CASA director. I have met a lot of local volunteers, staff, of course my board, and I am just...honestly, I'm amazed. I've been in nonprofits for 20 years. These are the most dedicated folks you're going to find. They work so hard. And when you think about it, I mean their goal is finding a placement, finding a permanent home for kids who are abused and neglected. So, you know, what better goal could they have? And they're unpaid and they work extremely hard. So I am really honored to be able to do this. And I want to thank you for this fund, because obviously the fund is allowing them to do much more greater work than they would have otherwise. So I am happy to answer any questions that the committee might have. [CASA]

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SENATOR ASHFORD: Yes, Senator Lathrop. [CASA]

SENATOR LATHROP: I do have a question. Did we fund...like we put \$100,000 and then \$200,000 in, right,... [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. [CASA]

SENATOR LATHROP: ...for the biennium? [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yep. [CASA]

SENATOR LATHROP: And so did that give you a surplus of CASA volunteers or do you know or can you project, if we were to provide you with the funding you need to maintain the level of CASA...training level... [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Uh-huh. [CASA]

SENATOR LATHROP: ...of CASA volunteers, what that would be? [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: I can't tell you. I could provide you with a projection of what that might be. What's happened in a couple of programs that have a surplus of volunteers is they're working with local programs that are nearby to lend them those volunteers, if the volunteers are willing. So for example, Seward has more volunteers than they need for Seward County but York doesn't have enough, and so two of those volunteers that didn't have a case were willing to go serve in Seward (sic) County. So they're scrappy and that's what they're doing. The other issue above the training costs and the recruitment costs of volunteers is having the staff to manage the volunteers. So for instance, in Lancaster and Douglas County the issues that we have are we need to make sure there's one staff to supervise or manage 30 volunteers, as long as that staff

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isn't doing anything else. That's the national CASA standard. So we need funding to be able to have those staff to manage those volunteers, on top of the training. So those are the kinds of issues that we're looking at as far...because so far what we've looked at is expansion into counties that don't have any. But what we're doing now is looking at those counties that just need more volunteers, what do we need to do to help them? So I'd have to figure out a projected cost for you. [CASA]

SENATOR LATHROP: Yeah, kind of the question I wondered about is we weren't providing you any money before, I don't believe. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Correct. [CASA]

SENATOR LATHROP: We then provide you with \$300,000. And so is \$300,000 what it would be to maintain this, or is that getting you caught up and then after you get caught up you don't need that much to maintain the level of CASA volunteers you hope to train? [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: It's starting to move us forward with growth and we need to grow more. I need to look at the numbers, but from what I know so far, we would need more than that funding to be able to serve every child in the state of Nebraska. [CASA]

SENATOR LATHROP: The supervisors don't volunteer for that job? [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: No. There is a new peer model that we're starting to use in Nebraska. It's brand new, I think it's two years old but I'm not sure, and we're going to start utilizing that. But because they're not trained staff, they can't supervise as many volunteers, their peers. So...but we're going to start implementing that to save cost as well. [CASA]

SENATOR LATHROP: Okay. [CASA]

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SENATOR ASHFORD: Senator Council. Sorry. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Yes, thank you, Senator Ashford. And thank you and congratulations on your new position. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Thank you. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: First, a follow-up to Senator Lathrop's question: As you've reported under your current training protocol, to continue as a CASA volunteer is it 12 hours annual training? [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. Yes, ma'am. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. So you have this 20 percent increase in the number of volunteers, so that's a corresponding increase in the number that would require this continuing education requirement. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: And actually the 20 percent increase in the number of volunteers included current volunteers that were retained. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: So what happened is your funding allowed us to provide more continuing education. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: The 12-hour...the 12-hour training to the volunteers who existed,... [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. [CASA]

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SENATOR COUNCIL: ...as well as adding volunteers. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Now on the data and the studies that have been conducted, when they talk about the difference between a youth with a CASA volunteer and a youth without a CASA volunteer, do you know, is that study protocol confined to a county, for example, if they conduct the study and they use Douglas County... [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Uh-huh. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...and they compare a youngster in Douglas County who had a CASA volunteer against a youngster in Douglas who didn't have a CASA volunteer? I'm... [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Or do they say here are kids who have CASA volunteers and here are kids who don't and it may be in a county where we don't have a CASA? That's what I'm trying to see,... [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Right. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...if we're...if the comparisons are based upon service availability. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. That particular study was based on just Douglas County, and so Nebraska costs. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. [CASA]

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CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: So when you start looking at your goal of all children by 2020, you're looking at adding coverage to 56 more counties. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Uh-huh. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: And that would require the staffing, someone to supervise... [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...the volunteers. So in that long-range planning, have you kind of begun to project out what that would look like based upon the number of youngsters who go through the system in the 56 counties that don't currently have CASA? [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. That's part of what the School of Social Work is doing with us is they have pulled together some of that data so far. Where we're at right now is we have specific data for all the counties and they've asked us, and we haven't decided yet, which counties we want to sort of get detailed information on so we can project out costs. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. Now admittedly, based upon population, there are going to be some counties where the needs aren't...or shouldn't be as great. I mean I can't remember the number when we were going through some issues that...how many counties--I think it was court costs--how many counties in the state have less than 300 in total population. So...and in those instances, I guess you have to make some decisions as to whether or not that's included in the model that you're developing or not. [CASA]

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CORRIE KIELTY: Uh-huh. Yeah, and you have to...you know, that's part of surveying the judges and county attorneys, do they want to have us there, as well as, okay, if there's only this many cases in that county, do we have this county serve that county as well to save those costs? [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. Okay. Thank you. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yeah. [CASA]

SENATOR ASHFORD: Good job. What brought you to this position? What other nonprofit work have you done? [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: My previous job to this was working at the federally qualified health center here in Lincoln, called People's Health Center, and I also worked for St. Monica's, which I understand you just had a hearing on treatment so, you know, if you guys want to talk to me about that too. (Laugh) [CASA]

SENATOR ASHFORD: What do you think about it? (Laughter) [CASA]

SENATOR LATHROP: Need more money probably. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: I think that there needs to be more residential services for adolescents,... [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Absolutely. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: ...which I bet you talked about, didn't you? [CASA]

SENATOR MCGILL: Uh-huh. [CASA]

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SENATOR ASHFORD: Well, we're not talking anymore. We're going to actually do it this time. (Laughter) [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Great! Wonderful. [CASA]

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you so much. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Thank you. [CASA]

SENATOR ASHFORD: And it's a great report and I'm glad you're spending our money, your money, our money wisely. So thank you. [CASA]

CORRIE KIELTY: Thank you. Stephanie is going to come up now. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: (Exhibit 2) I have some copies for you as well. Okay. Hello. As Corrie mentioned, my name is Stephanie Miller and I'm the executive director of the Lincoln County CASA program in North Platte, Nebraska. And basically, I'm here today to give you an update, hopefully a very short one, on how the state funding that you have provided two years ago has been instrumental in getting our program up and running and off the ground. You may not have realized it at the time that the funding was approved, but North Platte was one of the many communities across Nebraska that did not have a CASA program. And although it's been dreamt of for many years, Lincoln County CASA has recently become a full-fledged reality. It's really kind of taken on a life of its own. Once it was approved by the local county judge, the steering committee began less than two years ago, and they worked tirelessly to see their vision take shape. And as the Lincoln County CASA board of directors then came into existence, they too worked tirelessly, taking steps towards becoming an officially recognized CASA program with the assistance of nearby CASA programs and, of course, Nebraska CASA. In March of 2012, the board hired their first executive director, that's me, and by

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April we had achieved our 501(c)(3) status. With these two obstacles tackled, free office space, and the support of our CASA network, we were off and running. According to statistics from social services, as of April of this year 144 children in Lincoln County were currently in the system due to abuse or neglect. And in May, with a great sense of urgency, Lincoln County CASA began training our first class of volunteer advocates. By the end of June, County Court Judge Kent Turnbull swore in our first seven volunteers and our advocacy work had begun in earnest. Already the advocates' commitment to their CASA kids is obvious, recommending testing for developmental delays, connecting children to available community services, ensuring social services case plans are followed, informing the court of teenagers' wishes, and tracking down important medical records previously ignored by other parties. In spite of our limited history, the difference our advocates are making in the lives of abused and neglected children is clear. Sadly, since abuse and neglect continues to occur in Lincoln County, we need more advocates. And by mid-September, serving 11 children, all seven of our trained volunteers from that first class had been appointed to cases. But, thanks in part to funding we've received from the state to help pay for training and recruitment expenses, yesterday we...just yesterday--it was a big celebration--we graduated our second class of trained volunteer advocates. So this adds 11 new recruits to our ranks, more than doubling our previous efforts. So in just nine short months, our program has grown from 0 advocates to 19. Due to the commitment of our board members and my own efforts to speak about CASA any and everywhere, as well as the support of our local media, word is getting out about CASA in Lincoln County. Local banks and businesses, community organizations, church groups, individuals have all pitched in to help us accomplish our goals, but we could not, however, have come this far without the guidance of the Nebraska CASA program and the funding that is now coming from the state, thanks to your efforts. While the training, resources, and encouragement we've received thus far has helped us maintain our momentum, continued support is critical for our future success. So that's my spiel, but I would be happy to... [CASA]

SENATOR ASHFORD: Yes, Senator Council. [CASA]

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STEPHANIE MILLER: ...answer any questions about our program. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Thank you. And thank you for coming in, Ms. Miller. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yes. You're welcome. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: I just have a question about process,... [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Sure. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...since you're one of the new counties... [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yes. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...and you had to go through the whole developing your structure, applying for 501(c)(3) status. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Right. Uh-huh. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Your first seven volunteers, how was their training funded? Did you receive money through Nebraska CASA for them as well? [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yes, we received a recruit and training grant from the state. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. So you go through a grant application process... [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yes. Uh-huh. [CASA]

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SENATOR COUNCIL: ...and outline what you...and then you reapplied when you had...
[CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yearly. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yes. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: So is that...was it the second funding cycle where you were able
to get the funding for the 11 additional? [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yes, and Corrie could probably answer specifically, you know,
the time frame for all that, but, yes, we've received two grants I think for recruit and
training for our program, yes. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Uh-huh. Okay. Okay. I'm just trying to see how the process
works so that... [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yes. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...when you start bringing other counties on, and I will assume
that you either have to have 501(c)(3) status or a fiscal agent in place... [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yeah, there's some who operate under an umbrella or... [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yeah, there's different operations there but... [CASA]

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SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay, if you want to get started before you finish formalizing your structure. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yes. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yeah, there's definitely a series of steps. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. Well, congratulations. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Thank you. Yeah, we're... [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: To have, you know, 19 volunteers in a nine-month period, that's quite a... [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Yeah, we're just hanging on and taking... [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...significant accomplishment. How long is the training program? [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Generally, our training lasts about a month, but I think different programs handle that differently. It's 30 hours. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: So you can break it up... [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. [CASA]

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STEPHANIE MILLER: ...and, you know, however it works out conveniently for your group. [CASA]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Thank you. That's all. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Any other questions? [CASA]

SENATOR ASHFORD: None, I don't believe. Thank you. [CASA]

STEPHANIE MILLER: Okay. Thank you so much. [CASA]

SENATOR ASHFORD: It's all good. Thanks. Anybody else like to talk? Okay. That concludes our hearing. [CASA]