



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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TO: Members
Joint Committee on Finance

FROM: Bob Lang, Director

SUBJECT: Assembly Bill 786 and Senate Bill 675: Court Appointed Special Advocates Grant Program

Assembly Bill 786 and Senate Bill 675 (AB 786/SB 675) are companion bills related to the court appoint advocates grant program. Assembly Bill 786 was introduced on December 27, 2017, and referred to the Committee on Family Law. Senate Bill 675 was introduced on January 4, 2018, and referred to the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety. A public was held on January 30, 2018, for AB 786. The bills provide the Wisconsin Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (WiCASA) with an additional \$250,000 GPR in grants annually from the Department of Justice (DOJ) and eliminates the current program sunset date of July 1, 2019.

On February 1, 2018, the Assembly Committee on Family Law recommended passage of AB 786 with a 7-0 vote. On February 2, 2018, AB 786 was referred to the Joint Committee on Finance. On February 2, 2018, SB 675 was withdrawn from the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety and referred to the Joint Committee on Finance.

BACKGROUND

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) is a program that utilizes volunteers to assist with the needs of abused and neglected children who are unsafe at home and must live temporarily under the jurisdiction of the courts and the supervision of a county child welfare system. According to WiCASA:

"Each CASA volunteer conducts regular, face-to-face visits with their assigned child (or children) and makes independent, objective observations about how each child is coping, growing, interacting with others and responding to services and the environment. In addition to regular (usually weekly) and in-person contact with their assigned children, CASA volunteers have proactive contact with children's parents and primary caregivers, siblings, extended family members and foster parents. They talk with teachers and counselors (or daycare and Head Start providers) to monitor the children's educational progress and social development. CASA volunteers may also contact health and mental

health care providers and review related records that are relevant to children's health and well-being. They work in the best interests of the children they serve.

Monthly (or as requested by the court), CASA volunteers consolidate factual information into a written summary and submit it to the court. CASA volunteers also communicate the child's wishes to the court, including what that child desires as an outcome of court intervention, and his or her concerns and hopes for the future. They may also make recommendations to the court that they believe will benefit the child. ..."

There are currently nine CASA programs in the state operating in 12 counties: (a) La Crosse (in LaCrosse, Vernon and Monroe Counties); (b) Green Bay (in Brown and Marinette Counties); (c) Appleton (in Outagamie County); (d) Janesville (in Rock County); (e) Portage (in Columbia County); (e) Madison (in Dane County); (f) Milwaukee (in Milwaukee County); (g) Manitowoc (in Manitowoc County); and Baraboo (in Sauk County). The Wisconsin CASA Association is a statewide non-profit organization that supports court appointed special advocacy for abused and neglected children.

CURRENT LAW

Under 2015 Act 55, the Department was appropriated \$80,000 GPR annually during the 2015-17 biennium only to make grants to WiCASA. Under Act 55, the funding and statutory language associated with the grant requirement sunset on July 1, 2017.

Under 2017 Act 59, the sunset date of the GPR appropriation under the DOJ for the WiCASA was extended from July 1, 2017, to July 1, 2019, but was not provided funding. In addition, a PR appropriation was created and funded at \$80,000 PR annually during the 2017-19 biennium only, to support WiCASA. In total, the \$160,000 PR for the appropriation over the biennium is provided by funds transferred from the Attorney General's discretionary settlement fund in 2017-18.

SUMMARY OF BILL

The bill increases the GPR funding for the WiCASA grants to \$250,000 GPR annually and eliminates the July 1, 2019, sunset date for the GPR appropriation. As a result, the GPR appropriation would be on going. The bill also creates a new requirement for WiCASA to submit an annual report describing the use of the funds to the Governor, the Joint Committee on Finance, and the appropriate standing committees of the Legislature.

FISCAL EFFECT

The bill increases the GPR funding for grants to WiCASA to \$250,000 GPR from \$0 GPR annually and eliminates the July 1, 2019, sunset date for the GPR appropriation. In addition, \$80,000 PR annually in the 2017-19 biennium provided under 2017 Act 59 would remain. The fiscal estimate from DOJ indicates that there are sufficient revenues to support the PR funded component of the grant program. Under Act 59 and the bill, total funding for WiCASA would be \$330,000 annually (\$250,000 GPR and \$80,000 PR).

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