



STATEWIDE GUARDIAN AD LITEM OFFICE

Long Range Program Plan

Fiscal Years 2017-2018 through 2021-2022

September 9, 2016

Alan Abramowitz
Executive Director

600 South Calhoun Street, Suite 273
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Phone: (850) 922-7213
Fax: (850) 922-7211

AGENCY MISSION AND GOALS

STATEWIDE GUARDIAN AD LITEM

Mission: *"I am for the Child"*

Long Range Operational Goals

- To assure that every child has a voice in court.
- Using quantitative and qualitative data, demonstrate that Guardian ad Litem (GAL) advocacy correlates with improved outcomes for children in the dependency system.
- To implement a consistent core program of evidence based training for GAL volunteers which strengthens their ability to address the needs of the children they represent.
- To advance the mission alignment and operational relationships among and between the Office of the Executive Director, the local Non-Profit Boards, and the Foundation.

Priority # 1 Goal:

To provide effective advocacy and improved outcomes for all of Florida's abused, abandoned, and neglected children.

Priority # 2 Goal:

Advocate for timely permanency for children.

Priority # 3 Goal:

Increase number of volunteer advocates for children.

AGENCY OBJECTIVES

STATEWIDE GUARDIAN AD LITEM

Goal 1 Objective:

Represent all children under Court supervision as reported by the Department of Children and Families.

Goal 2 Objective:

Provide representation for children until permanency is achieved.

Goal 3 Objective:

Increase number of new volunteers.

AGENCY SERVICE OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE PROJECTION TABLES

STATEWIDE GUARDIAN AD LITEM (GAL) PRIMARY SERVICE OUTCOMES

Outcome: Average number of children represented.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 2014-15	FY2017/18	FY2018/19	FY2019-20	FY20-21	FY2021-22
24,290	24,345	24,345	24,345	24,345	24,345

Explanation: This number is the average of 12 months of data, from July 1 of one year to June 30 of the next. The Guardian ad Litem Program is charged by Florida Statute, Ch. 39, to represent all children in the dependency system. The Program is currently funded to represent all children in out-of-home care, and children ages 0 to 3 years in their own homes (in-home care). These two groups total an estimated 24,345 children, although this number fluctuates daily depending upon removals and discharges. [The number of children in out of home care on June 30, 2016 is 22,948. There are an estimated 1,397 children under age 3 years in in-home care.] In addition to fluctuations in numbers, the GAL Program does not control the number of children appointed to the program. These appointments are made by judges in the dependency courts.

The GAL Program has historically sought increasing resources to serve ever larger segments of all dependent children, however, the focus for resource requests for FY 17-18 will be stabilization of the workforce, which has been affected significantly by low salaries and high caseloads leading to high turnover.

For FY 15-16, People First data indicate turnover in critical classes that have client contact and court responsibility, as well as volunteer recruitment and supervision, as follows:

- Child Advocate Manager – 50.3%
- Sr. Child Advocate Manager – 20.9%
- Volunteer Recruiter – 64.5%
- Program Attorney – 61%
- Sr. Program Attorney – 37.8%

THE GAL Program has implemented a variety of no- or low-cost options to promote retention among critical classes. In addition, the Program has submitted a request for funding in FY 17-18 to support salary adjustments in the five key classes of positions listed above. Slowing staff attrition and reducing the lost productivity that results from turnover is essential before additional resources are requested for staff expansion.

Once the high turnover is addressed, the program will then address a key policy decision with the Office of the Governor and the Legislature; that is, 1) whether the program should request additional resources to pursue representation of all children in the dependency system (out-of-home and all in their own home), or 2) work with the Legislature to limit its statutory

AGENCY SERVICE OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE PROJECTION TABLES

mandate to representing only children in out-of-home care and children 0 to 3 years living in their own homes (as current funding levels permit).

Outcome: Average percent of children represented.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 2014-15	FY2017/18	FY2018/19	FY2019-20	FY20-21	FY2021-22
83%	77%	77%	77%	77%	77%

Explanation: The percentages reflected in the chart above show the proportion of ALL children in the dependency system served and projected to be served by the GAL Program. The percent of all dependent children represented has declined due to the dramatic increase in children coming into the dependency system. Additionally, in certain highly populated areas of the state, time to permanency has increased, preventing the GAL Program from closing cases and reducing the average number of children represented. The Guardian ad Litem Program is currently funded to serve children in out-of-home care, and the children under age 3 in their own homes (in-home care). If numbers remain stable, that would mean that an estimated 77% of all children in the dependency system would be represented by a Guardian ad Litem at the present level of funding.

Outcome: Percent of cases closed with Permanency Goal achieved.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 2014-15	FY2017/18	FY2018/19	FY2019-20	FY20-21	FY2021-22
65.87%	66%	67%	68%	69%	70%

Explanation: A key outcome measure for children is achievement of permanency through adoption, reunification with family, or a permanent guardianship arrangement. These are true permanency outcomes and, in each case, court supervision and case management by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is terminated when those goals are achieved.

Outcome: Number of new volunteers certified as a GAL.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 2014-15	FY2017/18	FY2018/19	FY2019-20	FY20-21	FY2021-22
2,807	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500

Explanation: The Program topped its goal of more than 10,000 volunteers statewide in February 2016. The GAL Program is limited by funding on the number of staff to recruit, train and oversee the work of volunteers in the Program.

**AGENCY SERVICE OUTCOMES AND
PERFORMANCE PROJECTION TABLES**

Outcome: Number of volunteers on June 30, annually.

<u>Baseline</u>					
FY 2014-15	FY2017/18	FY2018/19	FY2019-20	FY20-21	FY2021-22
10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000

Explanation: The Program topped its goal of 10,000 volunteers statewide in February 2016. At the end of June 2016, the number of volunteers was 10,850. This number includes a small proportion of volunteers who do not carry a caseload but rather perform administrative and office work for the program. The Program’s goal is to maintain at least 10,000 volunteers at all times.

This number does not include the many volunteers on non-profit boards in each judicial circuit that also support the program. These board-member volunteers donate their time, talent and money, and raise funds to meet the needs of children. They also recognize and support volunteers and staff, and augment the program in a variety of ways. This collaboration is an excellent example of a public-private partnership focused strictly on the best interests of abused and neglected children and the work of the GAL Program.

LINKAGE TO GOVERNOR'S PRIORITIES

PRIORITY #1 – IMPROVING EDUCATION

- World Class Education

STATEWIDE GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM (GAL)

- **GAL Program Goal #1:** *To provide effective advocacy and improved outcomes for all of Florida's abused, abandoned or neglected children.*

Since the 2009 passage of legislation allowing the appointment of “surrogate parents” to act in the place of a parent in educational decision making and in safeguarding a child’s rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, volunteer Guardians ad Litem have increasingly volunteered and been trained to serve as “educational advocates” for the children they represent. Between 2012 and 2016, the percentage of GAL volunteers serving as educational advocates has risen from 12% to 41%. This means that almost half of all GAL volunteers across the state represent the best interests of their assigned children not only in the court room and within the child welfare system, but also in the educational setting, where many of these children struggle due to multiple moves, learning or physical disabilities and mental health issues.

Research shows that children with GAL volunteers are more likely to pass all courses, less likely to have poor conduct in school, and less likely to be expelled than those who do not. In addition, these children have better controls against deviant behavior, they value achievement, and work out conflict better with others. [University of Houston and Child Advocates, Inc., “Making a Difference in the Lives of Abused and Neglected Children: Research on the Effectiveness of a Court-Appointed Advocate Program”]

PRIORITY #2 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION

- Focus on Job Growth and Retention
- Reduce Taxes
- Regulatory Reform
- Phase out Florida’s Corporate Income Tax

PRIORITY #3 – PUBLIC SAFETY

- Protect our communities by ensuring the health, welfare and safety of our citizens

STATEWIDE GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM (GAL)

- **GAL Program Goal #1:** *To provide effective advocacy and improved outcomes for all of Florida's abused, abandoned or neglected children.*

- **GAL Program Goal #2:** *Advocate for timely permanency for children.*

Children with a GAL volunteer are half as likely to enter foster care, and if they do enter foster care, they spend less time in care. They receive more services and are also more likely to have a positive view of the future. If parental rights are terminated, they are more likely to be adopted. [John Poertner and Allan Press, "Who Represents the Best Interests of Children in Court?" *Child Welfare* 69(6): p.537-549, 1990.] [Gene C. Siegel, et. Al., Arizona CASA effectiveness study. Report to the Arizona Supreme Courts, Administrative Office of the Courts, Dependent Children's Division, by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2001] [Susan M. Profilet, et al., Guardian ad Litem Project. Child Advocates Inc., 1999.] [Michael Powell and Vernon Speshock, Arizona Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA Program), Internal Assessment, 1996] [Ohio CASA/GAL Study Committee Report] [University of Houston and Child Advocates, Inc., "Making a Difference in the Lives of Abused and Neglected Children: Research on the Effectiveness of a Court-Appointed Advocate Program"] [Office of the Inspector General, Audit Report 07-04, December 2006]

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS STATEMENT

STATEWIDE GUARDIAN AD LITEM

The Guardian ad Litem Program was established in Florida in 1980 as a county-based program under the jurisdiction of the courts, to represent the best interests of abused, abandoned or neglected children involved in dependency proceedings. On January 1, 2004, the *Statewide* Guardian ad Litem Office was created to provide the infrastructure to increase functionality and standardization among the existing programs. Section 39.8296, Florida Statutes, establishes the State Office as an independent entity within the Justice Administrative Commission. There is a single statewide program with local offices in each of Florida's 20 judicial circuits.

The GAL Statewide Office has oversight responsibility for providing legal, operational and technical assistance to all guardian ad litem and attorney ad litem programs located within the judicial circuits. Responsibilities include collecting, reporting and tracking reliable case data, reviewing the programs in Florida and in other states, developing statewide performance measures and standards, developing a training program, reviewing various funding sources, and developing methods to improve delivery of program services.

Since 2004, an annual report has been filed each year which describes the environment, issues and strategies employed to address the GAL's basic mission to represent all dependent children, as defined within Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes. Annual reports may be viewed at the Guardian ad Litem Program's website, at <http://guardianadlitem.org/about-us/annual-reports-long-range-program-plans/>

Reviewers are invited to read the reports and contact the Statewide Office with any questions. The vision of the GAL Program is to provide quality, effective advocacy for all of Florida's abused, abandoned or neglected children. In order to realize this vision, the Program is leveraging state, county and private funds to meet the needs of dependent children.

The Guardian ad Litem Program grew significantly between FY 2012/13 and FY 2015/16, with the support of Governor Rick Scott and the Florida Legislature. There was a significant injection of new funding over these years and additional employees were hired to recruit, manage and oversee the work of additional volunteers. Additional funding was appropriated by the Legislature for FY 16/17 to enable the program to represent all children in out of home care and children ages 0 to 3 years in their own homes (in-home care).

The GAL Program has historically sought increasing resources to serve ever larger segments of all dependent children, however, the focus for resource requests for FY 17-18 will be stabilization of the workforce, which has been affected significantly by low salaries and high caseloads leading to high turnover.

The numbers of dependent children in out-of-home care in Florida increased by 31% between June 2013 and June 2016. The increase in the number of children entering care

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS STATEMENT

places a strain on resources across all child welfare agencies as well as the courts, and lengthens time to permanency. Dependency court judges exercise sole authority over appointment of children to the Program and on June 30, 2016, the Program was appointed to 25,189 children.

For FY 15-16, People First data indicate turnover in critical classes that have client contact and court responsibility, as well as volunteer recruitment and supervision, as follows:

Child Advocate Manager – 50.3%
Sr. Child Advocate Manager – 20.9%
Volunteer Recruiter – 64.5%
Program Attorney – 61%
Sr. Program Attorney – 37.8%

The GAL Program has implemented a variety of no- and low-cost options to improve retention among critical classes, and has submitted a request for funding in FY 17-18 to support salary adjustments in the five key classes of positions listed above. Slowing staff attrition and reducing the lost productivity that results from turnover is essential before additional resources are requested for staff expansion and representation of additional children.

Once the high turnover is addressed, the program will then address a key policy decision with the Office of the Governor and the Legislature; that is, 1) whether the program should request additional resources to pursue representation of all children in the dependency system (out-of-home and all in their own home), or 2) work with the Legislature to limit its statutory mandate to representing only children in out-of-home care and children 0 to 3 years living in their own homes (as current funding levels permit).

EXHIBIT II – PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND STANDARDS

Department: Justice Administrative Commission	Department No.: 21
---	--------------------

Program: Statewide Guardian ad Litem Program	Code: 21.31.00.00
Service/Budget Entity: PGM: Stw/Guardian ad Litem	Code: 21.31.00.00

Approved Performance Measures for FY2014-15	Approved Prior Year Standards FY2015-16	Actual Prior Year Standards FY2015-16	Approved Standards For FY2016-17	Requested Standards For FY2017-18
Average number of children represented	26,352	25,091	25,500	24,345
Average percent of children represented	93%	80.1%	85%	77%
Percent of cases closed with Permanency Goal achieved.	75%	64%	66%	67%
Number of new volunteers certified as a GAL	3,225	2,448	2,500	2,500
Number of volunteers on June 30	10,000	10,850	10,000	10,000

EXHIBIT III – ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Department: Justice Administration	
Program: Statewide Guardian ad Litem	
Service/Budget Entity: Statewide Guardian ad Litem	
Measure: Average percent of children represented	
Action:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Outcome</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Revision of Measure
<input type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Output</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Deletion of Measure
<input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment of GAA Performance Standards	

Approved Standard	Actual Performance Results	Difference (Over/Under)	Percentage Difference
93%	80.1%	(12.9%)	(13.8%)

Factors Accounting for the Difference: Not applicable. Target Exceeded.

Internal Factors (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Factors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff Capacity
<input type="checkbox"/> Competing Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Level of Training
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Previous Estimate Incorrect	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)	

Explanation:
 During FY 15/16, the GAL Program exceeded its funded capacity to represent children through caseloads that surpassed national standards. In addition, high turnover due to workload and low pay relative to comparable jobs in critical client contact positions reduced capacity to recruit volunteers and represent additional children.

External Factors (check all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resources Unavailable	<input type="checkbox"/> Technological Problems
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal/Legislative Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural Disaster
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Target Population Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)
<input type="checkbox"/> This Program/Service Cannot Fix The Problem	
<input type="checkbox"/> Current Laws Are Working Against The Agency Mission	

Explanation: The population of children in out-of-home care rose by 31% between June 2013 and June 2016.

Management Efforts to Address Differences/Problems (check all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Training	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Technology
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)

Recommendations:
 In addition to ongoing retention efforts, the Program will seek funding for FY 17-18 for salary adjustments for critical classes in which turnover has risen dramatically.

EXHIBIT III – ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Department: Justice Administration	
Program: Statewide Guardian ad Litem	
Service/Budget Entity: Statewide Guardian ad Litem	
Measure: Percent of cases closed with permanency goal achieved	
Action:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Outcome</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Revision of Measure
<input type="checkbox"/> Performance Assessment of <u>Output</u> Measure	<input type="checkbox"/> Deletion of Measure
<input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment of GAA Performance Standards	

Approved Standard	Actual Performance Results	Difference (Over/Under)	Percentage Difference
75%	64%	(11%)	(14%)

Factors Accounting for the Difference:

Internal Factors (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Factors	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Capacity
<input type="checkbox"/> Competing Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Level of Training
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Previous Estimate Incorrect	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)	

Explanation: Increases in caseloads in many areas of the state have affected the ability to achieve timely permanency and thus reduced the percent of cases with permanency achieved.

External Factors (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Resources Unavailable	<input type="checkbox"/> Technological Problems
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal/Legislative Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural Disaster
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Target Population Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)
<input type="checkbox"/> This Program/Service Cannot Fix The Problem	
<input type="checkbox"/> Current Laws Are Working Against The Agency Mission	

Explanation: Increases in caseloads in many areas of the state have affected the ability to achieve timely permanency and thus reduced the percent of cases with permanency achieved.

Management Efforts to Address Differences/Problems (check all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Training	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Technology
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Identify)

Recommendations:
As staffing is stabilized, we anticipate growth in the percentage of children with permanency goal achieved when their cases are closed.

EXHIBIT IV – PERFORMANCE MEASURE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Department: _____ Justice Administration _____
Program: _____ Statewide Guardian ad Litem _____
Service/Budget Entity: _____ Statewide Guardian ad Litem _____
Measure: _____ All Performance Measures X

Action (check one):

- Requesting revision to approved performance measures.
- Change in data sources or measurement methodologies.
- Requesting new measure.
- Backup for performance measure.

Data Sources and Methodology:

The data source for these measures are numbers tracked by each of the 20 Guardian ad Litem offices residing in the 20 judicial circuits. Each office records and reports, as of the last day of the month, data needed to assess Program performance and to determine whether standards are met.

Validity:

The methodology for collecting and reporting the data supporting all performance measures is an accurate approach to data collection.

Reliability:

The methodology is sound and consistent. Although minor issues remain regarding data collection, the Program feels confident that the process is dependable and will result in consistent information from year to year.

EXHIBIT V – ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES CONTRIBUTING TO PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Measure Number	Approved Performance Measures for FY 2015-16 (Words)		Associated Activities Title
1	Average number of children represented		Represent children
2	Average percent of children represented		Represent children
3	Percent of cases closed with permanency goal achieved		Represent children
4	Number of new volunteers certified as a GAL		Represent children
5	Number of volunteers on June 30		Represent children