

## Guardian ad Litem Legislative Budget Request Narrative for FY 17-18 Salary Adjustments for Guardian ad Litem Staff

This issue requests \$3,359,914 in recurring General Revenue funding for salary adjustments as well as OPS and contract hourly rate increases to stem high turnover in five mission-critical Guardian ad Litem (GAL) classifications: Child Advocate Manager (class code 8401), Senior Child Advocate Manager (class code 8402), Volunteer Recruiter (class code 8403), Program Attorney (class code 8700), and Senior Program Attorney (class code 8701). These positions advocate for abused and neglected children in dependency court, recruit and supervise volunteer advocates, and advise dependency court judges on the best interests of child victims.

This issue proposes a \$5,000 annual salary adjustment for employees, OPS and contract providers functioning in classes 8401, 8402, 8403, and 8701, and a \$3,000 adjustment for those functioning in class code 8700. The total cost for this issue includes both the adjustment to the employees' salaries or hourly rate, as well as the other employer-paid contributions associated with federal employment taxes, retirement contributions, and contributions for health and life insurance.

GAL salaries are among the lowest in state government for comparable classifications, according to a 2014 independent study by the consulting firm Five Points Technology, Inc. As other agencies in government and the private sector raised salaries for comparable positions, the Guardian ad Litem pay has remained at low levels, due to a focus on expanding staff to serve rising numbers of dependent children (rather than pay raises). The disparity between GAL compensation and other comparable positions has grown to be significant:

- GAL Child Advocate Managers make an average of \$31,459 annually, 18% less than the average Community Based Care ("CBC") case manager, who makes \$37,000.
- GAL Senior Child Advocate Managers, who supervise six or more professional employees, make \$34,716 on average, 7% less than CBC case managers who supervise no staff.
- GAL Volunteer Recruiters make \$33,753 on average, 9% less than CBC case managers, and 3% less than the national average for similar positions.
- The average GAL Program Attorney makes \$41,267 compared to their counterpart at DCF who makes \$45,022 – a 10% difference.
- The average GAL Senior Attorney makes \$46,333 annually, compared to the average DCF counterpart who takes home \$57,706 – a 20% difference.
- Unlike other attorneys in state government, Guardian ad Litem Attorneys do not receive enhanced health, life and disability benefits, which add about \$3,000 in value to other attorney benefits.
- Unlike child welfare staff, Guardian ad Litem employees do not qualify for student loan forgiveness under the child welfare training statute in s. 402.404, FS.
- According to the 7-12-16 People First database, Children's Legal Services Attorneys have 1 Paralegal Specialist for every two attorney positions. GAL has no such support structure for attorneys, making attorney workload even more difficult.

Since 2004, inflation has risen almost 28% and employee contributions toward retirement have risen by 3%. Pay for GAL positions that work directly with children and volunteers has not kept pace with salaries in the Department of Children and Families, CBC lead agencies, or attorneys with

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similar qualifications and workloads in other government agencies. GALs are parties to the same cases in dependency court and appear in court alongside these better compensated staff. GAL salaries and hourly rates need to be raised to ensure there are knowledgeable, consistent advocates for children in dependency court.

Historically, the GAL Program has attempted to recruit employees at the minimum salary in order to fill more positions and thereby represent more children in court. However, employee turnover has reached such high levels that this strategy is hurting rather than helping the Program's ability to provide advocacy to the maximum number of children. This high turnover follows in the wake of a 31% increase in the DCF out-of-home care caseload between June 2013 and June 2016 (from 17,591 children to 23,026 children).

Twelve percent of GAL staff surveyed in September 2014 indicated that they were or had been on public assistance during their GAL employment. More than half of these were receiving public assistance at the time of the survey. Exit interviews conducted over the past year indicate that despite their love for the Guardian ad Litem Program and its mission, many employees could not afford to remain and left for better paying jobs.

For FY 15-16, People First data indicate turnover in these classes 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 negative effects of high turnover include loss of institutional knowledge, additional duties for remaining staff, rising backlogs and reduced productivity, and high replacement costs for selection, onboarding, training and development of new employees. See Florida TaxWatch Report "When it Costs More to Pay Less," March 2014 (analyzing salaries for assistant state attorneys and assistant public defenders). While these impacts are not unique to GAL, the consequence is different because they affect the abused, abandoned and neglected children the Program represents.

High turnover among GAL staff is a contributing factor in delaying permanency for children, meaning children remain in out-of-home care longer, unable to return home or be adopted. In addition to the delays in permanency, turnover undermines trust between GALs and the abused and neglected children they represent, as well as retention of the Program's volunteer force of more than 10,000 Floridians. When surveyed, a majority of volunteers indicated regular contact with their Child Advocate Manager was very important. Lack of such support was identified as a reason volunteers would leave the Program.

The GAL Program is making efforts to retain its staff and volunteers through employee and family-friendly initiatives that are low or no-cost. Among the many strategies used are:

- Flexible work schedules
- Training opportunities through grant funding and Certified Public Manager training

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- Promotion from within where possible
- Mentoring and coaching relationships
- Rewards and recognition events
- Telecommuting where feasible

Adjusting salaries for functions experiencing high turnover is a crucial part of the GAL Program’s retention effort. Florida TaxWatch makes a conservative estimate that it costs 50% of an employee’s annual salary to recruit, replace and train them. This means that conservatively, it cost the GAL Program the equivalent of more than \$2 million in lost productivity to replace employees who left during FY 15-16. Therefore, in addition to being an operationally sound initiative, the salary increases will have a positive long-term effect on state finances.

Calculations are based on the following.

CLASS CODE	CLASS TITLE	Current Position FTEs	Projected Cost of Increase
<b>8401</b>	CHILD ADVOCACY MANAGER	306.00	1,764,717
<b>8402</b>	SENIOR CHILD ADVOCACY MANAGER	59.50	343,139
<b>8403</b>	VOLUNTEER RECRUITER	30.50	175,895
<b>8700</b>	PROGRAM ATTORNEY	58.00	200,693
<b>8701</b>	SENIOR PROGRAM ATTORNEY	100.00	576,705
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>554.00</b>	<b>3,061,150</b>

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Voices for Children Positions	20.00	115,341
OPS Positions		
Child Advocate Manager	16.25	87,466
Volunteer Recruiter	7.00	37,678
Volunteer Trainer	1.00	5,383
Program Attorney	5.00	16,148
Contract Best Interest Attorney	12.75	36,750

**TOTAL PROJECTED COST FOR THIS ISSUE** **3,359,914**