

**A RESOLUTION TO BE SUBMITTED
BY LEGISLATORS MAZUR & GRANT**

RE: Opposing Cuts in State Funding to Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children

WHEREAS, in the current New York State Budget (2012-13), the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children program sustained a 27% cut in funding; and

WHEREAS, there have been early indications that the Unified Court System may be contemplating the elimination of funding statewide for CASA for Children in the upcoming New York State Budget (2013-14); and

WHEREAS, the services of CASA for Children in Erie County are primarily provided by volunteers and the administrative overhead of the program, with only two professional staff, is held to a very low cost; and

WHEREAS, the low overhead is due, in part, to CASA for Children being housed at the Mental Health Association of Erie County, which provides in-kind support of office space and utilities; and

WHEREAS, at present, about 40 CASA volunteers serve a caseload of 160 children, speaking up for them in cases under the jurisdiction of Family Court, including child welfare cases; and

WHEREAS, once assigned by a Family Court Judge, a CASA volunteer reviews the Family Court file to gather family history, including court orders, and interviews the child's parent, foster parent, caseworker, attorney, teacher and medical professional to help determine what is in the best interest of the child; and

WHEREAS, CASA volunteers gather all pertinent information and write the reports that are submitted to Family Court Judges and the child welfare system so that the best possible permanent plans for our community's most vulnerable children can be developed; and

WHEREAS, CASA volunteers monitor the progress of these plans, keeping open the lines of communication among all parties, visiting the child on a monthly basis and continually reporting back to the Court for the duration of the assignment; and

WHEREAS, CASA volunteers are highly qualified, screened and trained, having successfully completed 30 hours of class work and court observation; and

WHEREAS, CASA for Children has unique insight into the special needs of military families where a parent has been deployed or is a veteran; and

WHEREAS, the people of Erie County are well-served by the CASA for Children program and receive a high return on investment for the modest amount of state funding (\$60,000 annually) that this organization receives; and

WHEREAS, the current caseload of children in foster care in Erie County exceeds 800, and each of these children is a potential future client of CASA for Children, demonstrating that the demand for these important, child-centered services is more likely to increase, rather than decrease, in the coming years.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Erie County Legislature stand in opposition to any further cuts in funding to the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children program in New York State, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Unified Court System; and be it further

RESOLVED, that certified copies of this resolution be conveyed to Governor Andrew Cuomo, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, the WNY Delegation to the State Legislature and all others deemed necessary and proper.

FISCAL IMPACT: None for resolution.