

MEMO: September 27, 2016

TO: Rep. Anne Pugh, Chair Joint Legislative Child Protection Oversight Committee

FROM: Brian J. Grearson, Chief Superior Judge

Subject: Guardian Ad Litem (Improvements since Act 60)

The following may assist the committee in understanding the challenges facing the judiciary in meeting the demand for GALs:

- **GAL volunteer snapshot:**
 - Approximately 290 GALs serving approximately 2100 children in CHINS and delinquency cases alone
 - GALs are also assigned to other case types:
 - 23% are assigned to at least one Domestic case (i.e. divorce and/or child custody)
 - 14% are assigned to at least one mental health case
 - 10% are assigned to at least one probate case.
 - National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (“NCASA”) standard is a maximum of 5 children per volunteer.
 - VTGAL would need 420 volunteers only taking CHINS and delinquency cases to meet this standard.
- **GAL supervision:**
 - VTGAL utilizes general funds, grant funds, and dedicated time from court personnel to provide staff support in 12 out of 14 units utilizing 5 PT staff.
 - This works out to 8.4 hours a week for each county with an assigned coordinator
 - Orleans and Lamoille County do not have an assigned coordinator and are being supported directly by the Program Manager
 - NCASA quality assurance standards call for 1 full time supervisor for every 30 volunteers
 - Vermont’s program has the equivalent of 1 FTE for every 138 volunteers.
- **GAL Training:**
 - VTGAL uses the majority of the budget to cover the cost of pre-service trainings for GALs.
 - New volunteers must also shadow one or more experienced volunteers for 6-12 weeks before they are approved by the program to accept their own case.
 - VTGAL uses a combination of remaining funds and grant funds to provide other training statewide opportunities to volunteers throughout the year.
 - Each county also has monthly or bi-monthly brown bag lunches where training on specific topics relevant to their work may be provided.

- **Franklin County:**

- GALs have significantly more children assigned to them than in any other county
 - Almost half the current GALs have more than 20 children assigned.
- Cases also last longer so GALs have less turnover in their current assignments.
- 3 GAL resignations in 2016 required reassigning over 80 children.
- There are not enough GALs to meet the current demand even with volunteers from other counties taking cases.