

IMPLEMENTATION FACT SHEET: CASAs in Child and Family Teams SB 925 (Beall), Chapter 151, Statutes of 2018, Effective: 01.01.2019

Bill Summary

Senate Bill 925(Beall), effective January 1st, 2019, entitles every youth with a CASA to have their CASA volunteer present as part of their Child and Family Team (CFT). SB 925 recognizes that youth in care need support while advocating for themselves and that Court Appointed Special Advocates are one of the vital formal supports for foster youth. This bill amends section 16501 of the Welfare and Institutions Code to ensure that a youth's Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) will be included as a member of the CFT, unless the youth explicitly requests that their casa not attend meetings.

Background

Across California there are over 8,000 CASA volunteers serving more than 13,000 foster youth. CASAs play a unique role in their CASA youths' lives, serving both as a mentor to the youth and as a best interest advocate before the court. This unique role often allows the CASA to spend more time with a youth than some of the other members of the child's team and gain insights that can help inform the team's goals and strategies.

The Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), authorized by Assembly Bill 403 (Chapter 773, Statutes of 2015) is a comprehensive reform of the foster care system that is the culmination of years of effort. One of the major of CCR was the creation of the Child and Family Team (CFT). The team is to identify the strengths and needs of the child or youth and their family, and to help achieve positive outcomes for safety, permanency, and well-being. WIC §16501. At least every placement change or every six months, a child and family team meeting is to be convened for every child and youth.

Prior to January 1st, 2019, CASA volunteers were often invited to be a part of the CFT because they serve as formal supports for their CASA youth. Last year SB 925 clarified the law, to name CASAs as team members to ensure they were invited across the board rather than on a case by case basis.

Specifically, SB 925 updated Section 16501 of the Welfare and Institutions Code to include, "[t]he child or youth's Court-Appointed Special Advocate, if one has been appointed, unless the child or youth objects," as one of the statutorily required CFT members. WIC §16501.

Implementation

For CASAs: You are by law required to be a member of the Child and Family Team involving your CASA youth, unless your CASA youth explicitly asks that you not be invited. This means you are to be provided notice of meetings and are to be included in all Child and Family Team work. If you are not invited to every Child and Family Team meeting, let your CASA supervisor know so they can reach out to the caseworker or their supervisor.

For CASA Programs: Save a copy of this Factsheet and share it with: (a) the Judges in your jurisdiction; (b) the child welfare agencies in your jurisdiction; (c) the probation agencies in your jurisdiction; (d) the CASA volunteers in your program; (e) the child welfare attorneys in your jurisdiction; and (f) the CASA youth, if age appropriate. Be sure to update your CASA trainings to include best practices on how to participate in a CFT.

For Judges: With regards to SB 925, going forward you can know that the Court Appointed Special Advocates you appoint in your dependent children's lives are able to participate in Child and Family Teams. This should ensure better advocacy for the CASA youth in these meetings and will allow your appointed CASAs to provide more informed updates to you in their court reports. Please review WIC §16501, and ask the parties and CASAs whether CFTs are occurring in accordance to the law.

For Youth: You have the right to have your CASA at your Child and Family Team meetings. You also have the right to ask that your CASA not be at your CFT meetings. If your CASA is not being invited to your Child and Family Team meetings and you have not asked them to be excluded, or if they are being included against your objection, you may contact your CASA, your attorney, or report the violation to the CA Foster Youth Ombudsman office at 877-846-1602.

For Social Workers: By law effective January 1st, 2019, you must include every youth's CASA as part of the Child and Family Team unless the youth explicitly asked for their CASA to be excluded. Be sure to update your practice regarding notice of meetings to include CASAs in all logistical and planning functions the same as all other Team members.

Child and Family Team Best Practices

How to make Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings youth friendly:

- Meet with the youth beforehand and discuss their wants and goals for the meeting
- Develop a system with the youth regarding how they feel most comfortable with your participation
- Develop a system with the youth for how to let you know if they need a break from the meeting
- Make sure your youth knows the names and titles of everyone in the room, and that no one is in the room that makes them feel uncomfortable
- Make sure that acronyms are not used in the meeting, or if they are used that they are immediately explained
- Make sure that the youth is addressed directly and not talked about in the third person

How to be an effective member of the CFT:

- Support the youth in sharing their ideas and feelings
- Help the conversation stay strengths-based
- Meet with the child's social worker and other members of the team as appropriate prior to a CFT meeting to get a sense of current needs, services and ideas.
- Research ideas for addressing the needs you see
- Come with an open mind
- Work with the case-carrying social worker on an agenda or share potential agenda ideas you have before meetings
- Step up and volunteer to follow up on goals the team decides upon

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a CFT?

The child and family team is a group of individuals convened by the placement agency and engaged in team-based processes to identify the strengths and needs of the child or youth and their family in order to help achieve positive outcomes for safety, permanency, and well-being. Meetings shall take place whenever there is a change in placement, whenever the team thinks they are needed, and at least every six months.

2. What if the youth is not asked if they want their CASA to be included in the CFT?

Then the CASA must, by law, be invited to the CFT.

3. What if the youth does not want their CASA to be present at a meeting?

Then the CASA should not be invited.

4. Where can I learn more about CFTs, Best Practices, and the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR)?

You can read more about CFTs, best practices, and CCR in a variety of places, including:

- 1) Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16501, which defines the child and family team, available at http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=16501.&lawCode=WIC
- 3) Relevant All County Letters (ACLs) 16-84; 17-104, 17-104E, 18-09, 18-23, 18-81, and 18-81E available at <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Letters-Regulations/Letters-and-Notices/All-County-Letters>
- 4) The California Youth Connection Continuum of Care Reform Tool Kit available at: https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Documents/Continuum_of_Care_toolkit.pdf.