

72 House District

Columbus Office:

Vern Riffe Center
77 S. High Street
11th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111
(614) 466-2004



Committees:

Chair - Behavioral Health
Finance
Higher Education
Finance Subcommittee on
Agriculture, development,
and natural resources

Gail Pavliga
State Representative

Chairman Manning, Vice Chairwoman Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 122. The bill passed unanimously out of the House Criminal Justice Committee and easily out of the full House.

This bill will increase legal protections for Guardian ad Litems (will be referred to as GAL's) and Court Appointed Special Advocates (will be referred to as CASA members). This bill would make it a first-degree misdemeanor for someone to abuse, threaten, or harass guardian ad litem and court appointed special advocates when carrying out their court mandated duties.

"GAL's" are court appointed individuals that assist a domestic or juvenile court in determining what is in a child's or other court designated parties, best interest. GAL's most often serve in dependency, neglect, or abuse cases and "CASA" members are volunteers who have been trained to advocate for the best interest of a child who has been abused or neglected.

Unlike GAL's, court appointed special advocates work exclusively on cases involving children. GAL's and CASA members can stay on a case for several years. They are advocates appointed by a judge to determine what is in the best interest of individuals who do not have an attorney of their own. These individuals serve the court, yet they are not afforded the same protections as officers of the court, like lawyers and judges are. This can leave them subject to harassment,

intimidation, stalking, or worse from those who disagree with their independent, court assigned assessment. We are now seeing a shortage of GAL's and CASA members because many are afraid of the repercussions they will face when giving their opinions on what is in the children's best interest. House Bill 122 will help prevent this growing issue, and I hope you all will see the importance of this bill.

Thank you again Chairman Manning, Vice Chairwoman Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Now I would like to introduce my joint sponsor Representative Miller.