

## **GAL Advocacy Network Conference Call**

### **I. Update on Legislative Session**

- A. The House and Senate will each pass their budgets this week. They will be different and the two chambers will hold a conference beginning April 20 (or soon thereafter) to work out differences.
- B. Each chamber will name conferees, typically appropriations committee members but with some "at large" members from legislative leadership.

### **II. Update on Lobbying Efforts to Date**

- A. All legislators we have talked with have received multiple calls/emails regarding the proposed cuts to the Program.
- B. Legislators are supportive of the Program. They feel embattled because of the dire situation the state economy is in.
- C. Though most communications with legislators have been on-message, there have been some communications containing inaccurate information. There have also been isolated incidents where the message has been personal and therefore unproductive. We must do all we can to avoid this going forward.
  - 1. Recognize the difficult circumstances legislators are in.
  - 2. Be objective, respectful in delivery of message.

### **III. Strategy for Remainder of Session**

- A. Individuals who wish to advocate for the Program should contact legislators prior to conference but after conferees are named. The list of conferees will be emailed and posted on the GAL Foundation website.
- B. Individuals who are working with the media should get their message out by the end of this week or early next week.
- C. Phone calls or emails are both good ways to deliver the message. A phone call with a follow up email may be the best strategy.

### **IV. Delivering the Message.**

- A. Ask legislators to reduce cuts to the Program in the House and the Senate.
- B. Explain that abused, abandoned, and neglected children desperately need advocates in court to protect their rights, move the case more quickly and provide independent advocacy of their best interests.
- C. If you are able to provide a personal story demonstrating how GAL advocacy made a difference for a child, this is helpful.
- D. Be concise. If you are leaving a phone message, state the purpose for your call, for example: *I am calling to urge the Senator/Representative to oppose cuts proposed for the GAL Program.* If you are sending an email, state the purpose in the subject line, for example: *Protect GAL Program funding for children.*

### **V. Other Information.** This information is not intended to be part of the message, but if provided only to answer questions.

- A. Technical information about the proposals:
  - 1. In Senate Bill 2600, our "line number" is 802. The Senate is proposing an 8% cut (\$2.6 million) and the elimination of 49 positions. We estimate this will result in 990 children losing representation. Also, 12.5 hourly employees will lose jobs.
  - 2. In the House Bill 5101, our "line number" is 802. The House is proposing a 23% cut (\$7.6 million) and the elimination of 154 positions. This will result in approximately 5,700 children losing representation and over 150 people will be laid off. This is more than one-third of the Program's workforce.
- B. Be aware of some of the justifications offered for the cut:
  - 1. The Program has grown over 220%.

- a. This statistic is accurate, but you must go back to FY 2002/2003 while the Program was still in the court system (with a budget of \$9 million).
- b. All increases the Program has been given have gone to meet an unmet need. When the Program was in the court system, fewer than 50% of children had advocates. At the Program's highest level of funding, over 85% of children had advocates.
- 2. The Program was spared cuts when other agencies took reductions.
  - a. Since 2007/2008 the Program has suffered over \$2.5 million in budget cuts (over 7%) . This has caused thousands of children to go unrepresented.
  - b. The Program only truly missed one cut - in 2007 Special Session.
  - c. In the 2009 Special Session, the GAL Program's 4% cut was vetoed. However, there has been a "holdback" of funding to agencies statewide. Therefore, despite the veto, the Program has actually experienced a 4% cut this year. The Program has had to keep 32 positions frozen, resulting in a loss of representation for over 1000 children.

**VI. Next Steps**

- A. Names of conferees/leadership will be distributed.
- B. Contact legislators/media after conferees are named (as early as 4/20).
- C. Post-session follow up (hopefully thanking those legislators who minimized the cuts).