

Information Regarding 2009 Budget Proposals

The House Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee proposed budget reduces the GAL Program funding by over \$7.6 million. This is a 23% reduction.

- These reductions will result in the layoff of more than 150 employees. Many of these employees recruit and train volunteers to advocate for children. In many cases, these employees are also the advocate for the children in care.
- The Program's ability to coordinate and support 7,000 volunteers statewide would be drastically compromised.
- Most importantly, if this cut were to pass, over 5,700 abused, abandoned, and neglected children will have no one to represent their best interests in dependency proceedings.

We understand that the Legislature must reduce spending to address the state's budget crisis, but a 23% cut to representation for children is too much. The Program's budget has already been reduced 7% since 2007/2008 (over \$2.5 million).

Guardians ad litem fight for children to get needed services. They push the system to get children into safe, permanent homes faster. They provide independent information to the court and advocate for child-focused decisions. Without a GAL - the children navigate the system without an independent advocate of their own.