



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

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February 1, 2021

Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
State House, H-107
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker of the House
State House, H-101
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

Re: Annual Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Programs Report

Dear President Ferguson and Speaker Jones,

Pursuant to Courts and Judicial Proceedings, § 3-830(b)(3)(ii), please find enclosed the Annual Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Programs Report for Fiscal Year 2020.

If you have any questions, please contact Kelly Franks at (410) 260-1722, or via email at kelly.franks@mdcourts.gov.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pamela Harris".

Pamela Harris
State Court Administrator

Enc.

Hon. Bill Ferguson
Hon. Adrienne A. Jones
February 1, 2021
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cc: Honorable Mary Ellen Barbera, Chief Judge, Court of Appeals
Honorable Keith Baynes, Chair, Conference of Circuit Judges
Honorable John P. Morrissey, Chief Judge, District Court
Honorable Nicholas E. Rattal, Chair, Specialty Courts and Dockets Committee
Faye Gaskin, Deputy State Court Administrator
Roberta Warnken, Chief Clerk, District Court
Kelley O'Connor, Assistant State Court Administrator, Government Relations & Public
Affairs
Yaakov E. (Jake) Weissmann, Chief of Staff, Senate President
Alexandra Hughes, Chief of Staff, House Speaker
Sarah Albert, Mandated Reports Specialist

**Annual Report for
Court-Appointed Special Advocate Programs**

Fiscal Year 2020



**Administrative Office of the Courts
February 2021**

Issued by the Administrative Office of the Courts' (AOC) Juvenile and Family Services (JFS) pursuant to Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article § 3-830(b)(3)(ii).

Prepared by Kelly Franks, Senior Program Manager/Grants & Services; Jovonne Lewis, Family and Court Programs Analyst; and Karen Thomas, Grants & Services Analyst, using data provided by the programs.

Contact: Kelly Franks at 410.260.1722 or Kelly.Franks@MDCourts.gov.

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I. Overview

The Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program operates in Maryland subject to Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article, § 3-830. The Annotated Code of Maryland states that the role of the Court-Appointed Special Advocate is to:

- (1) Provide the court with background information to aid the court in making decisions in the child's best interest; and
- (2) Ensure that the child is provided appropriate case planning and services.

The CASA volunteer is considered a friend of the court and is appointed at the judge's discretion to represent the child's best interests. Supporting the ongoing work of CASA programs is consistent with the Maryland Judiciary's mission to provide fair, efficient, and effective justice for all, as well as its strategic goal to be responsive and adaptive to changing community needs.

By the end of the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2020, the COVID-19 health emergency began to have a major impact on CASA programs. Volunteer advocates were no longer able to have face-to-face visits with their assigned children, and the courts moved to all remote hearings. CASA's important job of ensuring CASA youth were being provided appropriate case planning and services became more difficult. In response, CASA programs adjusted their operations. The Maryland CASA Association took the lead and held weekly network meetings to enable programs to share information, technical support, and ideas. Programs trained their volunteers to use Zoom, FaceTime, Duo, Google Meets and other online platforms to meet with the children, parents, social workers, and other stakeholders. These quick adjustments enabled CASA programs to continue to meet the needs of the court by providing timely and accurate information about the needs of the children they serve. During a time when Maryland's most vulnerable populations are most at risk, CASA programs have been critically important to ensuring that the courts have the information they need to keep these children safe and protected.

In Fiscal Year 2020 the Administrative Office of the Court (AOC) eliminated the issuance of Memoranda of Understanding between individual CASA programs and their local courts and instituted a statewide compliance review process. This new process formalized our existing review of the programs' compliance with the Maryland CASA Performance Standards ([found here](#) in Appendix B). As part of this review, staff from the AOC's Juvenile and Family Services department monitor the performance of CASA programs by reviewing quarterly data and progress reports, conducting site visits, and considering input from the Maryland CASA Association. After the fiscal year closes, JFS completes a close-out compliance report highlighting the achievements and challenges of the program during the year. If a program is determined to be in compliance with the Maryland CASA Program Performance Standards, a compliance letter is issued by the State Court Administrator and provided to the National CASA Association to support the recertification of the program. This new process ensures the AOC is fulfilling the responsibilities under Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article, § 3-830 associated with administering CASA programs.

II. Program Operations

A. Counties Served

Fifteen CASA programs were active in Maryland in Fiscal Year 2020, serving 21 counties. Only Somerset, Wicomico, and Garrett counties do not have CASA programs. Efforts made by the Circuit Court to start a CASA program in Wicomico County were not successful. However, the Worcester County program: CASA of the Lower Shore, is now exploring the possibility of expanding to serve Wicomico County. Planning will begin in calendar year 2021.

Programs by Service Area and Start Date

Programs (<i>Official Names</i>)	County/Countries Served	Start Date
Voices for Children of Montgomery County (Formerly CASA of Montgomery County)	Montgomery	1987
CASA of Baltimore City	Baltimore City	1988
CASA of the Mid-Shore (formerly CASA of Talbot and CASA of Queen Anne's & Kent Counties) (CASA of Talbot began serving Dorchester County in 2010. In 2014, the program expanded to Queen Anne's and Kent Counties.)	Talbot Kent Queen Anne's Dorchester	1990 2009 2009 2010
Court-Appointed Special Advocates of Washington County	Washington	1991
Voices for Children of Howard County	Howard	1992
CASA of Harford County	Harford	1996
Anne Arundel County CASA	Anne Arundel	1997
CASA of Southern Maryland	St. Mary's Charles Calvert	1998 2004 2007
CASA of Prince George's County	Prince George's	1992-1995 2001
CASA of Baltimore County	Baltimore County	2002
CASA of the Lower Shore	Worcester Wicomico	2002 2002-2008
CASA of Frederick and Voices for Children of Carroll County (Became one program under the Frederick County Mental Health Association in 2011)	Carroll Frederick	2002 2003
CASA of Caroline	Caroline	2004
Allegany County CASA	Allegany	2013
CASA of Cecil County	Cecil	2015

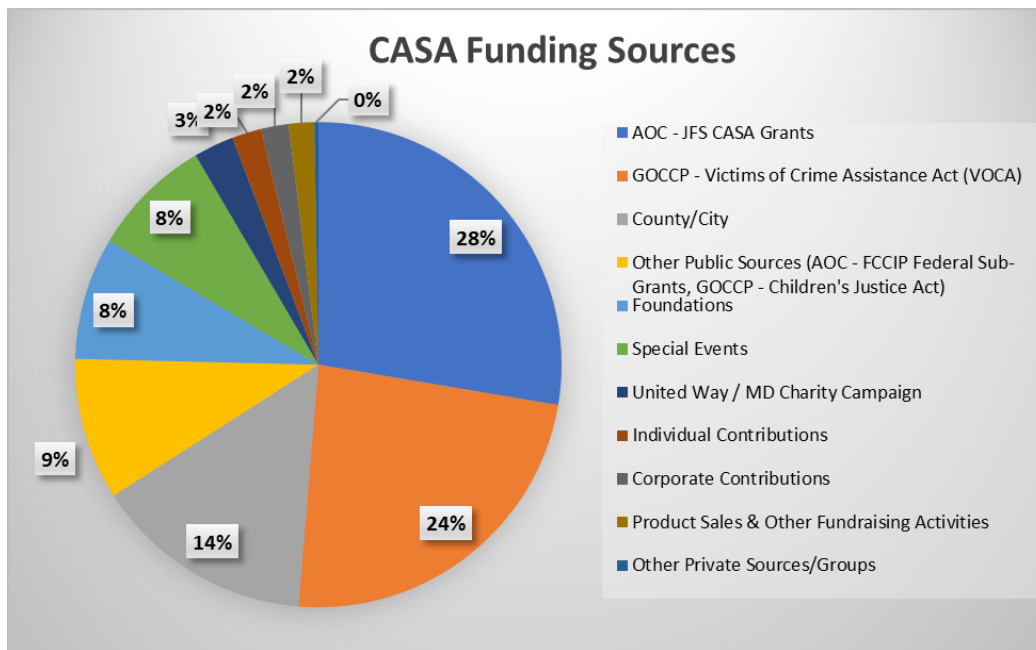
B. Funding Sources

All CASA programs were funded by the Maryland Judiciary in Fiscal Year 2020. Judiciary funding amounts are determined using a formula which factors in the number of volunteers who have served children, the number of volunteers trained, the needs of the community to be served, and the performance of the program. Grantees are required to match 100 percent of funds awarded.

FY20 Award Amounts by Program

Voices for Children of Montgomery County	\$222,074
CASA of Baltimore County	\$154,175
CASA of Prince George’s County	\$152,115
CASA of Baltimore City	\$123,149
CASA of Frederick and Voices for Children of Carroll County	\$121,157
Anne Arundel County CASA	\$96,333
Court Appointed Special Advocates of Washington County	\$89,500
CASA of the Mid-Shore	\$86,515
CASA of Harford County	\$84,129
CASA of Southern Maryland	\$79,825
Voices for Children of Howard County	\$71,250
CASA of Cecil County	\$68,914
CASA of the Lower Shore	\$58,149
Allegany County CASA	\$46,033
CASA of Caroline	\$26,450

Support for programs from other funders varies by program. Some CASA programs are independent non-profits; others are programs within larger non-profit organizations.



Sixty-two percent of CASA funding comes from public-sector funders. The public sources include:

- 44% AOC – JFS CASA grants
- 37% Victims of Crime Assistance Act funding through Governor’s Office on Crime Control and Prevention
- 15% County/City
- 4% Other public sources (e.g., Foster Care Court Improvement Program, Children’s Justice Act Committee)

Thirty-eight percent of CASA funding comes from private-sector funders and individual contributions. The private sources include:

- 38% Foundations/grants
- 21% Special events
- 21% Individual contributions
- 5% United Way/CFC/MD Charity Campaign, etc.
- 5% Other private sources
- 4% Corporate contributions
- 2% Groups or organizations
- 1% Product sales & other fundraising activities

In Fiscal Year 2020, special events funding declined by eight percent from Fiscal Year 2019. This is likely a result of the coronavirus health emergency causing many programs to cancel events in the fourth quarter. It is notable that individual contributions increased by 9 percent during this same period offsetting the loss of events funding.

C. Staffing

Although there are 88.5 positions in CASA programs statewide, AOC - JFS grant funding only supports the full or partial salary and/or fringe costs of 52 positions within CASA programs.

Total Positions: 88.5

Full time: 44 Part time: 44.5

Based on the total working hours, the Full-Time-Equivalency (FTE) for all positions is 69.8 full-time positions.

Total Positions Supervising Volunteers: 55

Full time: 25 Part time: 30

Based on the total working hours, the Full-Time-Equivalency (FTE) for positions supervising volunteers is 38.3 full-time positions.

III. Program Activities

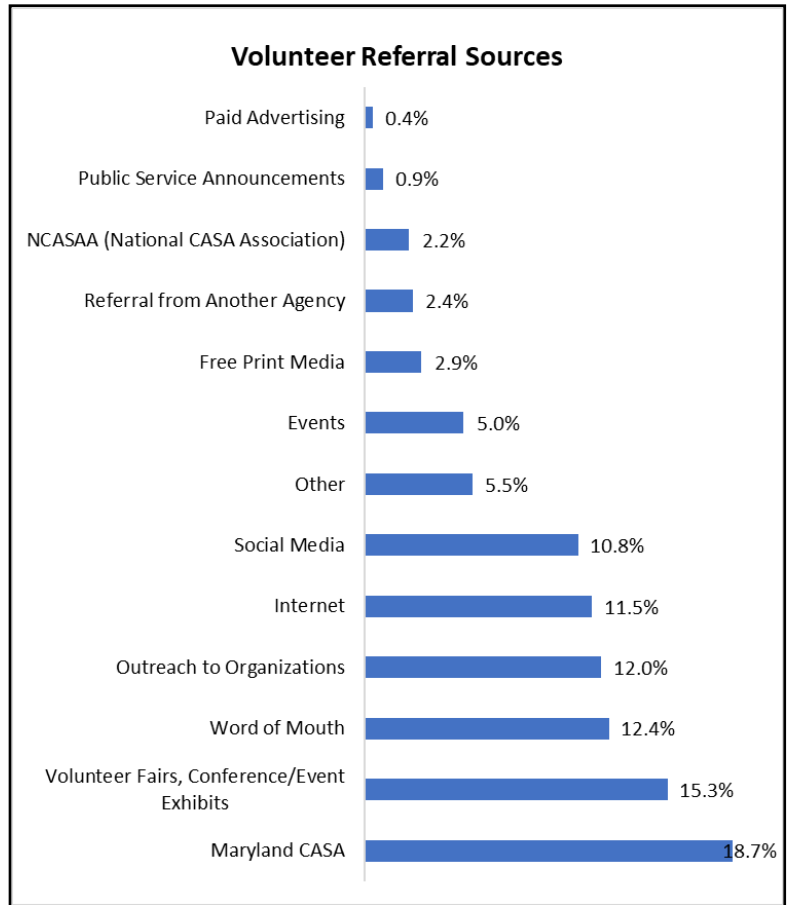
A. Volunteers

1. Recruitment

In Fiscal Year 2020, CASA programs statewide received 2,053 volunteer inquiries. This was a seven percent decrease from Fiscal Year 2019. During Fiscal Year 2020, more than 22 percent of volunteers reached their local CASA program through online resources. Of those, 11 percent learned about CASA through social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Approximately 21 percent of volunteers were referred to their local CASA program by the National CASA Association (NCASAA) or the Maryland CASA Association.

Volunteer applications received: 783.

This is an 11.8 percent increase over the year before. During the past year, CASA programs have shifted to an online application portal that has made it easier for volunteers to apply.



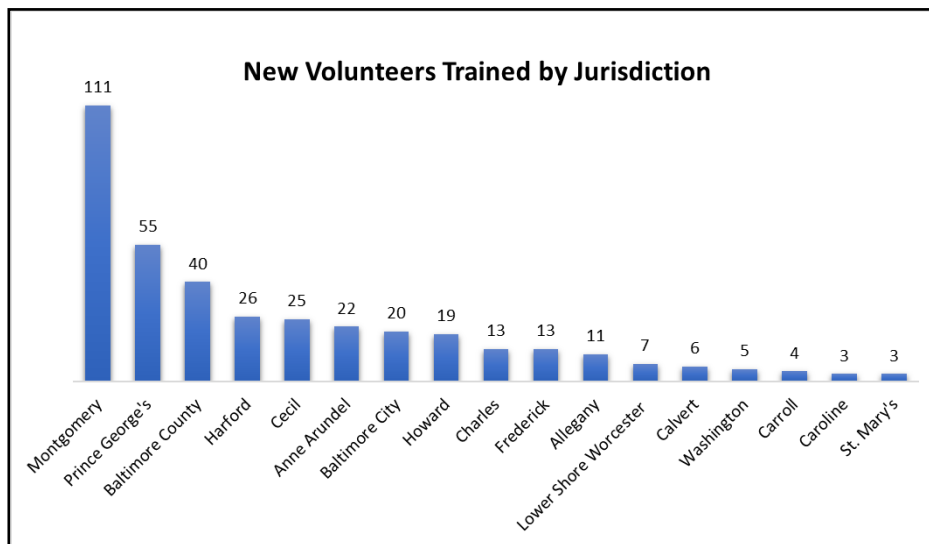
Prospective volunteers interviewed: 617. Of the total volunteer applications submitted, 79 percent resulted in an interview. This is 88 more interviews than in the prior year, a 16.6 percent increase. During the health emergency, programs shifted to using remote platforms for interviewing. This provided more flexibility and enabled programs to complete more interviews than were completed in the past.

2. Training

Pre-service training:

In Fiscal Year 2020, 383 new volunteers were trained. Of the volunteers who started training, 78 percent completed training. Some volunteers are screened-out through the interview process and others are screened-out during training. The number of volunteers trained in Fiscal Year 2020 declined by 20 percent from Fiscal Year 2019 due to the COVID-19 health emergency. Programs that usually pack 10-15 trainees into small conference rooms for 40 hours of pre-service training had to cancel Spring trainings and pivot to online training. Programs have been successful in making that shift to online training and volunteer rosters are now growing.

In-service training (continuing education): CASA programs provided 421 hours of ongoing training to active volunteers, a 26 percent decrease from Fiscal Year 2019. The COVID-19 health emergency impeded the programs' ability to provide regular training opportunities during the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2020. Approximately 168 hours of that training (40 percent) focused on increasing cultural competence of volunteers, an increase of 12 percent over the prior year.



**As the number of children entering foster care declined in Fiscal Year 2020, CASA of the Mid-Shore did not have a need to train any new volunteers.*

3. Retention/Attrition

Although the goal of all CASA programs is to have volunteers serve their assigned child for the entirety of the child's foster care placement, CASA volunteers are only required to serve for a minimum of one year. More than 61 percent of the volunteers who were serving children on the last day of the Fiscal Year had been serving for 12 months or longer.

Volunteers who left the program: 265. This is a decrease of 14 percent over Fiscal Year 2019 when 309 volunteers left the program. Thirty-six percent of volunteers who left in Fiscal Year 2020 left after the closure of their assigned case.

Average length of service (volunteers who left): 29.5 months. On average, volunteers who left the program in Fiscal Year 2020 served more than two years and five months.

In the Mid-Shore program, 16 volunteers who left the program in Fiscal Year 2020 served an average of 82 months each; each volunteer spent more than 6.8 years with the program. In the Baltimore City, Harford County, and Worcester County programs, the average length of service was more than three years.

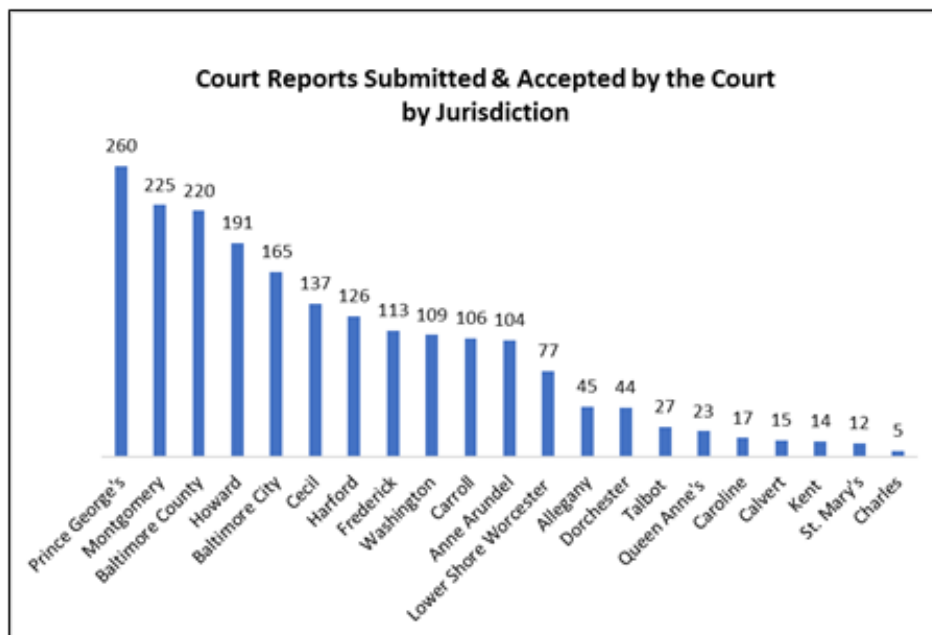
4. Advocacy

CASA volunteers advocate in court for the best interest of the children they are assigned to serve. To inform this advocacy, CASA volunteers visit regularly with their assigned child and meet with family members and professionals involved in the child's life (e.g., social workers, therapists, teachers). With the support of the program, the CASA volunteer prepares a report which provides the court with information about the child and recommendations regarding the

child’s needs and future placement. Court reports with recommendations are submitted at every hearing for the children assigned to the CASA programs.

Court reports submitted by CASA and accepted by the court: 2,305.

The COVID-19 health emergency caused limitations on court access and a reduction in the number of hearings. As a result, only 257 reports were submitted in the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2020, compared to 707 submitted in the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2019.



Volunteer attendance at court:

CASA volunteers attended 78 percent of the hearings for which they prepared a report. This rate is often affected by continuances; a volunteer may appear for the initial hearing but be unavailable to attend on the rescheduled date. CASA program staff attend all hearings.

5. Service

A goal of every CASA program is to provide a volunteer for every child who is adjudicated as a child in need of assistance (CINA). In Carroll, Dorchester, Howard, Kent, Queen Anne’s, Talbot, and Worcester counties, the programs have provided CASA volunteers for nearly all CINA children. There are exceptions in the case of older youth who may choose not to have a CASA, and youth who have been placed so far away that assigning a volunteer may not be feasible.

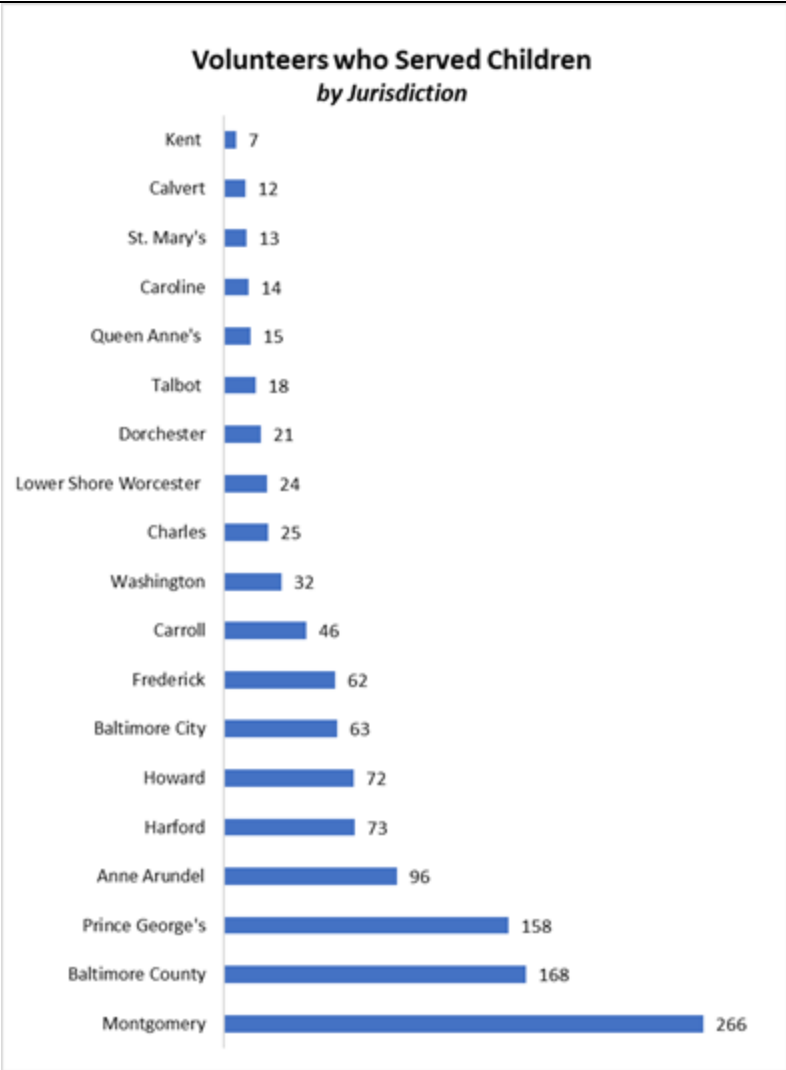
Volunteers serving children in FY20: 1,294.

This is a decrease of 82 volunteers (six percent) from Fiscal Year 2019.

Volunteers serving children on the last day of FY20: 988.

Overall, the number of CASA advocates serving children on the last day of Fiscal Year 2020 decreased by 1.5 percent over the last day of Fiscal Year 2019.

The COVID-19 health emergency limited programs’ ability to train new volunteers, slowed the influx of new cases, and hampered the ability to assign new volunteer advocates which resulted in programs ending the Fiscal Year with fewer volunteers than the prior year.



6. Volunteer Demographics

Gender Identity

Male	13.1%
Female	86.9%

Age

21-29	9.7%
30-39	15.6%
40-49	17.1%
50-59	24.6%
60 + above	33.1%

Race/Ethnicity

American Indian / Alaska Native	0.2%
Asian / Asian American	1.9%
Black / African American	23.4%
Hispanic / Latino	3.7%
Indian	0.3%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	0.4%
White	65.3%
Two or more races	4.7%
Other	0.1%

Education

High School/GED	6.2%
Some College	9.9%
College	42.3%
Post-Grad	31.1%
Unknown	10.0%
Other	0.4%

Employment Status

Full-time	53.7%
Part-time	16.7%
Retired	20.9%
Unemployed	5.2%
Unknown	2.4%
Other	1.0%

B. Children

In August 2020, 4,636 children were in foster care in Maryland. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#).) Approximately 31 percent of these children received the benefit of CASA advocacy compared with 38 percent in Fiscal Year 2019. As detailed in the volunteer section above, the COVID-19 health emergency impacted the number of children coming into care and consequently, the influx of cases to CASA programs slowed dramatically. In April,

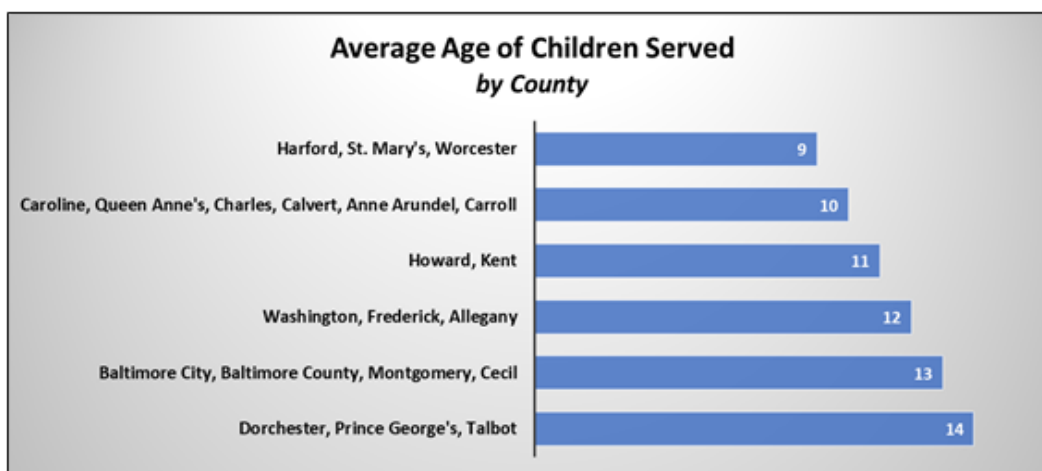
May, and June 2020, a total of only 15 children were placed in out-of-home placements statewide.

1. Children Served by a Volunteer Advocate in FY20: 1,451

2. Children Being Served by a Volunteer on the Last Day of FY20: 1,057

3. Details about Children Served in FY20:

More than 50 percent of children served in Fiscal Year 2020 were 14 or older. At this age, youth participate in transition planning to prepare for adult life. CASA programs and volunteers play an important role in ensuring that youth have these plans in place and working to prepare youth to be independent.



Children Demographics

Gender Identity

Male	50.3%
Female	49.7%

Age

Birth to 2	10.1%
3 to 6	13.6%
7 to 13	24.9%
14 to 17	26.1%
18 +	25.3%

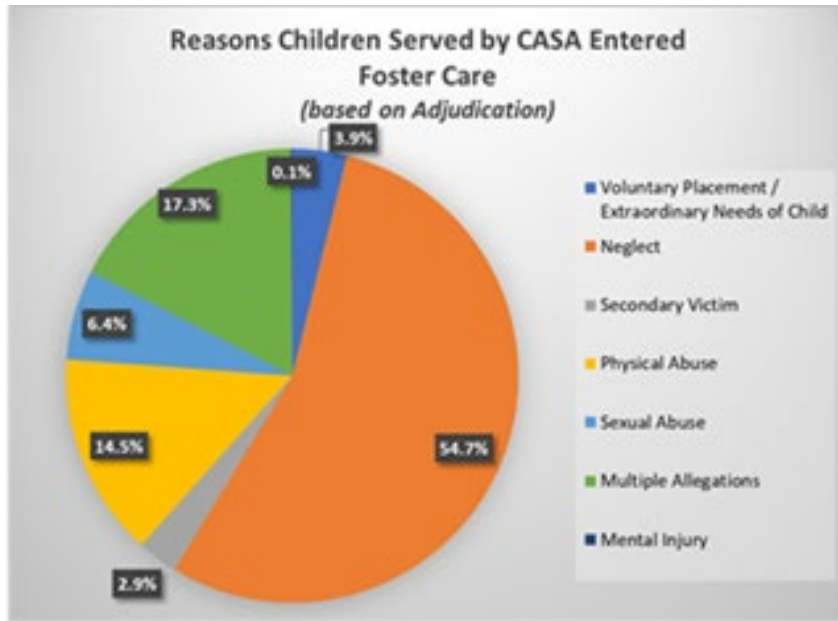
Race/Ethnicity

American Indian / Alaska Native	0.0%
Asian / Asian American	1.3%
Black / African American	40.4%
Hispanic / Latino	8.7%
Indian	0.4%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	0.1%
White	36.6%
Two or more races	12.5%

Programs strive to achieve cultural competence in all the volunteers they train. However, looking at all programs together, there remains a wide disparity in reported racial and gender identity between volunteers and CASA youth. As shown above, 37 percent of youth served in Fiscal Year 2020 were white and 63 percent had a racial identity other than white. Volunteers are disproportionately white and female with 65 percent of the volunteers identifying as white and 87 percent as female. Some programs have made great strides in achieving racial parity. In Prince George’s County CASA, for example, the volunteers’ racial identities closely mirror those of the children being served but recruiting more male volunteers continues to be a universal challenge.

The Maryland Judiciary has partnered with the Maryland CASA Association to bring diversity, equity, and inclusion training to CASA programs. During the first half of Fiscal Year 2020, this training was provided regionally to help program managers and staff think about how to make their programs more welcoming to all people. The Maryland CASA Association has continued to push this initiative forward providing training, resources, and technical support to programs as they work to become more inclusive.

Reasons for entering care: Neglect is the most-commonly adjudicated reason that children served by CASA enter foster care, accounting for 54.7 percent of cases in Fiscal Year 2020.

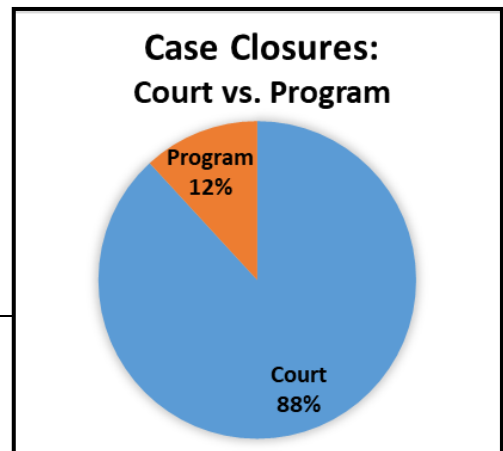


“Neglect” includes abandonment and educational/medical/physical neglect. Neglect is commonly the reason children with substance-abusing parents come into care. Of the children served by CASA programs in Fiscal Year 2020, 42 percent had at least one parent whose substance abuse was a contributing factor to their involvement with the Department of Social Services (DSS).

4. Case Closures

CASA programs closed 441 cases in Fiscal Year 2020. Of those, 390 cases were closed by the court, and 51 cases were closed by the programs, but remained open in court.

A program closure may occur for a variety of reasons. Examples include an older child who does not want a CASA, a child who is inaccessible to the volunteer due to



placement location or runaway status, or a child who is in a stable permanent placement and is no longer in need of CASA advocacy.

Time spent in foster care: The amount of time children served by CASA will spend in foster care before finding a permanent home, or aging out of the system, varies from county to county. Statewide, the average is nearly three years, with 137 youth served by CASA spending three years or more in care and nine youth spending more than 10 years in foster care.

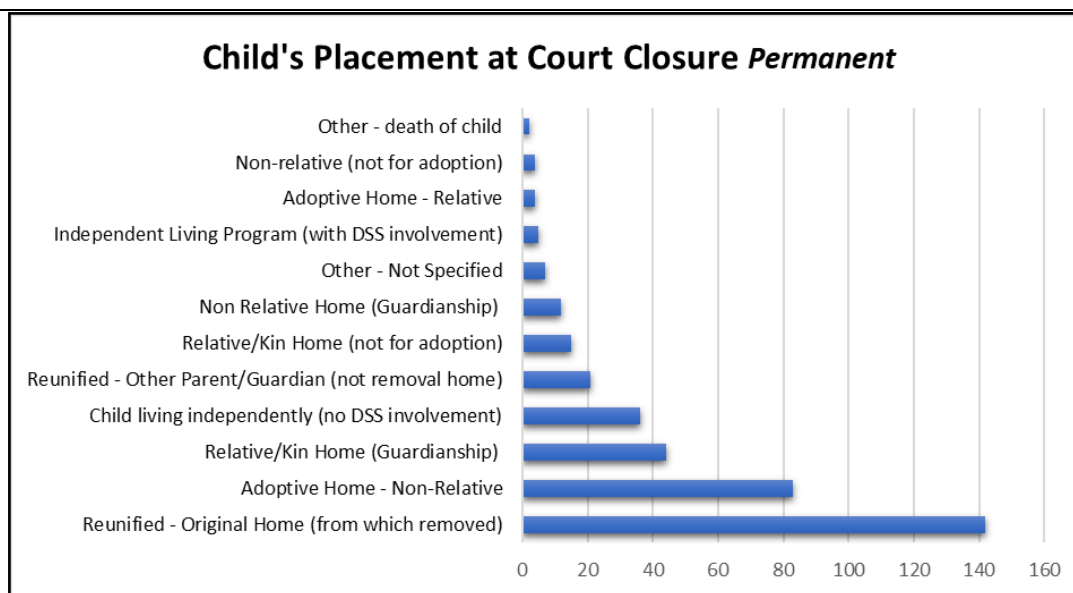
Average Length of Time in Foster Care for Cases Closed by the Court

Jurisdiction	# of Closed Cases	Months	Years
Allegheny	11	13.6	1.1
Baltimore City	19	19.2	1.6
Washington	24	19.6	1.6
Charles	17	19.7	1.6
Calvert	9	21.0	1.8
St. Mary's	7	21.7	1.8
Queen Anne's	7	22.6	1.9
Cecil	21	23.6	2.0
Harford	27	24.0	2.0
Montgomery	43	24.0	2.0
Anne Arundel	46	24.3	2.0
Prince George's	37	24.3	2.0
Howard	17	24.5	2.0
Carroll	22	25.1	2.1
Worcester	21	25.4	2.1
Caroline	3	29.7	2.5
Frederick	20	31.5	2.6
Baltimore County	38	34.8	2.9
Dorchester	12	37.9	3.2
Talbot	2	86.5	7.2

**Kent County did not have any cases close during the fiscal year.*

Placements at Court Closure

Permanent placements: Of the 390 children served by CASA volunteers whose cases were closed by the court during Fiscal Year 2020, 96 percent (375) were in a permanent placement at closure. A permanent placement is any placement that has committed to providing a legal and physical home for the child until adulthood. Of the children served by CASA whose cases closed to permanency, 60 percent were reunified or placed with family members. Of those reunified with their family, 72 percent went home to their parent(s) and 28 percent went to live with other relatives.



Non-permanent placement: Of the 390 children served by CASA volunteers whose cases were closed by the court during Fiscal Year 2020, 15 children were living in “non-permanent” living situations at closure. In all but one of these non-permanent closures, the youth was over the age of 18 and either (1) requested that the court close their case; (2) was not compliant with DSS and the court’s orders; (3) had been out of contact (or run-away) for a significant amount of time; or (4) was incarcerated as an adult. In the remaining case, the youth remained in an out-of-home placement.

Impact of the Stage of CASA Appointment on Outcomes: In 2011, JFS began collecting data from CASA programs regarding case closures and stage of case at appointment. Analysis of this data has consistently shown that assigning CASA volunteers early in a child’s case leads to better outcomes. As a result, JFS has continued to encourage earlier appointments. The Fiscal Year 2020 closure data demonstrates that:

- Children who were assigned to CASA before their case reached the review stage (generally within six months of entering care) spent an average of **15.03 fewer months in care** than children who were assigned to CASA during CINA review or permanency planning hearings. **This is a more than a year difference.**
- On average, children who were assigned to CASA before their case reached the review stage (generally within six months of entering care) had **fewer placements** than children who were assigned to CASA during or after the review stage.

IV. CASA in the Coming Year

During the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency, the CASA volunteer’s critical role in protecting the best interests of children in the State’s care has become even more apparent. As we continue in these unprecedented times, our most vulnerable children and families continue to struggle with the issues that brought them into the system, but resources are currently much more

limited. Most children are in remote school and do not have the benefit of in-person teachers, school nurses, and school social workers. Much-needed mental health and substance abuse treatment services have become more difficult to access, and feelings of isolation and depression are at an all-time high. For CASA youth, having a CASA volunteer to advocate for their needs and provide a caring presence in their lives provides a critical support system that many are now lacking.

As programs adapt to the challenges of today, they continue to be committed to increasing statewide capacity to serve more children and support more volunteer advocates, thereby further helping the courts with critically important decisions about the best interests of the youth served. Programs will continue remote trainings, visits, and volunteer supervision, enabling them to continue growing and serving more children. Despite the challenges of the COVID – 19 health emergency, the Worcester County program is planning an expansion to serve children in Wicomico County. Other programs are working together to improve efficiency, share resources, and ensure high quality advocacy is being provided. The Maryland CASA Association is continuing program reviews to ensure the highest quality of service is being provided to both the children and the courts.

V. Conclusion

The Maryland Judiciary is committed to supporting CASA programs statewide. These programs provide vital information and recommendations to judges and magistrates who are making best interest determinations in cases involving some of Maryland’s most vulnerable youth. The advocacy that CASA programs provide furthers the Maryland Judiciary’s mission to provide fair, efficient, and effective justice for all. By collaborating and supporting the ongoing work of CASA programs, the Judiciary is advancing its strategic objectives to (1) be responsive and adaptable to community needs, (2) build partnerships, and (3) use resources wisely. The Maryland Judiciary continues to be a critically important source of funding for CASA programs across Maryland.