

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

Fiscal Year 2023



**Administrative Office of the Courts
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Prepared by Kelly Franks, Senior Program Manager/Grants & Services; Jovonne Lewis, Family and Court Programs Analyst, using data provided by the programs.

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

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
I. Overview	4
II. Program Operations	4
A. Counties Served	4
B. Funding Sources	5
C. Staffing	7
III. Program Activities	7
A. Volunteers	7
1. Recruitment	7
2. Training	8
3. Service	9
4. Volunteer Demographics	10
5. Advocacy.....	11
6. Retention/Attrition	12
B. Children	13
1. Children Served by a Volunteer Advocate.....	13
2. Children Being Served by a Volunteer on the Last Day.....	13
3. Details about Children Served	13
4. Children Demographics	14
5. Case Closures	15
IV. CASA in the Coming Year	18
V. Conclusion	18

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.

Supporting CASA programs statewide is a critically important part of the Judiciary's mission to provide fair, efficient, and effective justice for all. 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. In addition to providing the courts with critical information, CASA volunteers develop trusting relationships with the children they assist, relationships that have a lifelong impact.

Nationwide, there has been a steady decline in volunteerism over the past five years. A recent study produced by AmeriCorps in partnership with the Census Bureau found a seven percent decline in volunteerism in the United States between 2017 and 2021. That study is available here: <https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact/volunteering-civic-life>. Maryland's CASA programs are not immune from that trend but have fared better than other program types. Across all volunteer-based programs in Maryland, the decline was 12.6 percent (with a 3.2% margin of error), but in Maryland's CASA programs the decline was only six percent. With many volunteers serving more than one child and some programs using paid staff advocates, CASAs maintained service levels while the number of children served increased by 31 children in 2023.

Supporting the ongoing work of CASA programs aligns with the Maryland Judiciary's mission to provide fair, efficient, and effective justice for all and its strategic objectives to (1) be responsive and adaptable to community needs, (2) build partnerships, and (3) use resources wisely. The Maryland Judiciary's support is critical to the success of these programs.

II. Program Operations

A. Counties Served

CASA programs were active in 23 Maryland jurisdictions in Fiscal Year 2023, serving all jurisdictions except Garrett County. Service was expected to expand into Garrett County in Fiscal Year 2023, but the retirement and vacancy in the Circuit Court Judge position, coupled with the departure of CASA of Western Maryland's Director, have caused delays in that expansion.

Programs by Service Area and Start Date

Programs (Official Names)	County/Counties Served	Start Date
Voices for Children of Montgomery County <i>(Formerly CASA of Montgomery County)</i>	Montgomery	1987
CASA of Baltimore City	Baltimore City	1988
CASA of the Mid-Shore <i>(formerly CASA of Talbot and CASA of Queen Anne's & Kent Counties)</i> <i>(CASA of Talbot began serving Dorchester County in 2010. In 2014, the program expanded to Queen Anne's and Kent Counties.)</i>	Talbot Kent Queen Anne's Dorchester	1990 2009 2009 2010
Court-Appointed Special Advocates of Washington County* <i>*Program closed 03/31/21.</i>	Washington	1991-2021
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 <i>(Became one program under the Frederick County Mental Health Association in 2011)</i>	Carroll Frederick	2002 2003
CASA of Caroline	Caroline	2004
CASA of Western Maryland <i>(formerly CASA of Allegany County)</i>	Allegany Washington	2013 2021
CASA of Cecil County	Cecil	2015
Life Crisis Center: CASA of Somerset & Wicomico	Somerset Wicomico	2022

B. Funding Sources

All CASA programs were funded by the Maryland Judiciary in Fiscal Year 2023. 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, and program performance. Grantees are required to match 100 percent of funds awarded. Awards increased by \$366,066 over Fiscal Year 2022. This amounted to an eighteen percent increase to support cost-of-living adjustments for staff, the expansion of services at our newest program (CASA of the Lower Shore), and at other programs where the need is greatest, and the programs

demonstrated an ability to meet that need (Baltimore City, Prince George’s County, and Harford County.)

FY23 Award Amounts by Program

CASA of Prince George’s County	\$237,725
Voices for Children of Montgomery County	\$236,370
Life Crisis Center: CASA of The Lower Shore	\$226,768
CASA of Baltimore City	\$225,070
CASA of Baltimore County	\$167,819
CASA of Western Maryland	\$154,245
CASA of Harford County	\$130,893
Anne Arundel County CASA	\$122,567
CASA of Frederick and Voices for Children of Carroll County	\$118,769
CASA of Cecil County	\$96,346
CASA of Southern Maryland	\$96,328
CASA of the Mid-Shore	\$89,472
Voices for Children of Howard County	\$72,962
CASA of Caroline	\$30,560

The support that programs receive from other funders varies by program. Some CASA programs are small independent non-profits; others are programs within larger non-profit organizations.

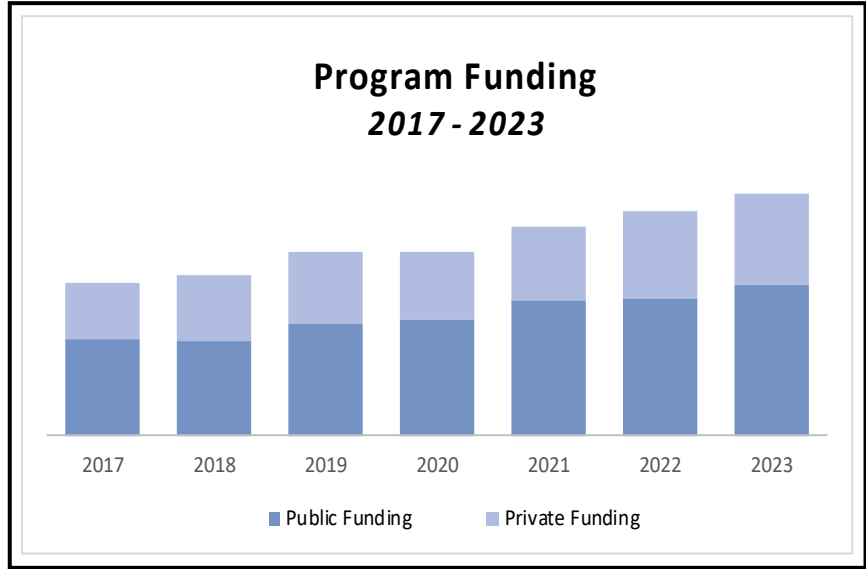
Sixty-two percent of CASA funding comes from public-sector funders.

- 28.1% AOC-JFS CASA Grants and
- 21.1% Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services (GOCPYVS) – Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)
- 9.6% County/City
- 3.3% Other Public Sources (AOC – Foster Care Court Improvement Project Federal Sub-Grants, GOCPYVS - Children's Justice Act)

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

- 11.4% Foundations/Private Grants
- 8.8% Special Events
- 8.5% Individual Contributions
- Product Sales & Other Fundraising
- 2.1% Activities
- 3.9% Other Private Sources
- 1.8% National CASA
- 0.7% Corporate Contributions
- 0.7% United Way/CFC/Maryland Charity Campaign

Program income continues to grow steadily. There was a two percent decline in Fiscal Year 2020 related to the many fundraising events that were cancelled due to the pandemic. Despite this slight decrease, program funding rebounded in 2021, growing by more than fourteen percent. In 2023, the AOC award increases made up 69 percent of the total increases to income with the remainder coming from small increases foundation funding and special events revenue.



C. Staffing

Although there are 100 positions in CASA programs statewide, AOC - JFS grant funding only supports the salary and fringe costs of 65 positions within CASA programs.

Total Positions: 100

Full time: 57 Part time: 43

Based on the total working hours, the Full-Time-Equivalency (FTE) for all positions is 80.6 full-time positions.

Total Positions Supervising Volunteers: 56.5

Full time: 29.5 Part time: 27

Based on the total working hours, the Full-Time-Equivalency (FTE) for positions supervising volunteers is 44.4 full-time positions.

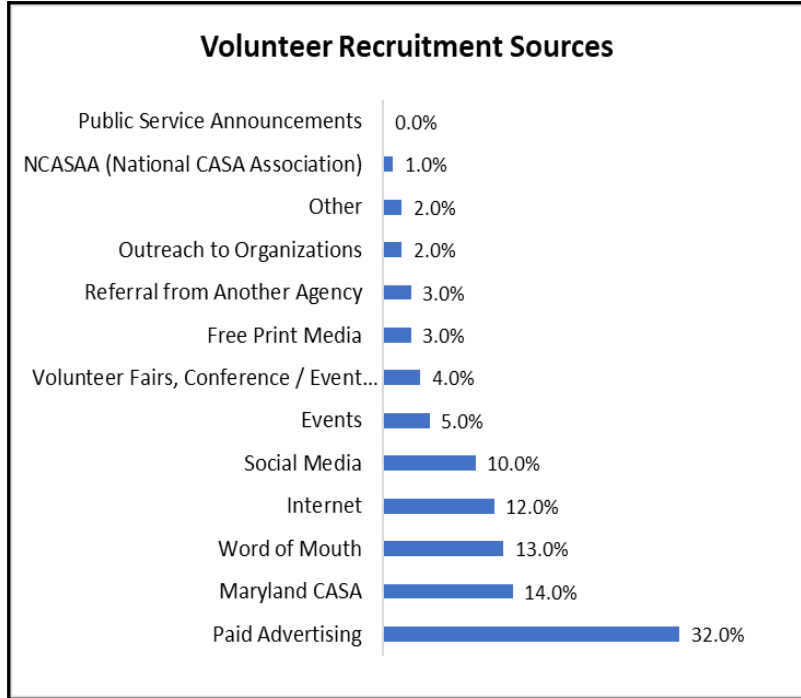
III. Program Activities

A. Volunteers

1. Recruitment

In Fiscal Year 2023, CASA programs statewide received 1,926 volunteer inquiries. This was a nearly 19 percent decrease from Fiscal Year 2022 and the lowest number of inquiries in the time we have been tracking inquiries, more than twelve years. CASA programs are not alone in this decline. Non-profit organizations across the country have seen steady declines in recruiting and retaining volunteers since the pandemic started in late 2019. (See: <https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact/volunteering-civic-life>) During Fiscal Year 2024, we plan to provide training to the CASA programs to assist with volunteer recruitment and retention efforts.

During Fiscal Year 2023, the most successful source of volunteer inquiries was paid advertisements. Ninety-seven percent of the volunteers' inquiries resulting from paid advertisements were in Prince George's County. Overall, Prince George's County received 40 percent of the volunteer inquiries reported. Twenty-two percent of volunteers reached their local CASA program through online resources. Of those, ten percent learned about CASA through social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.



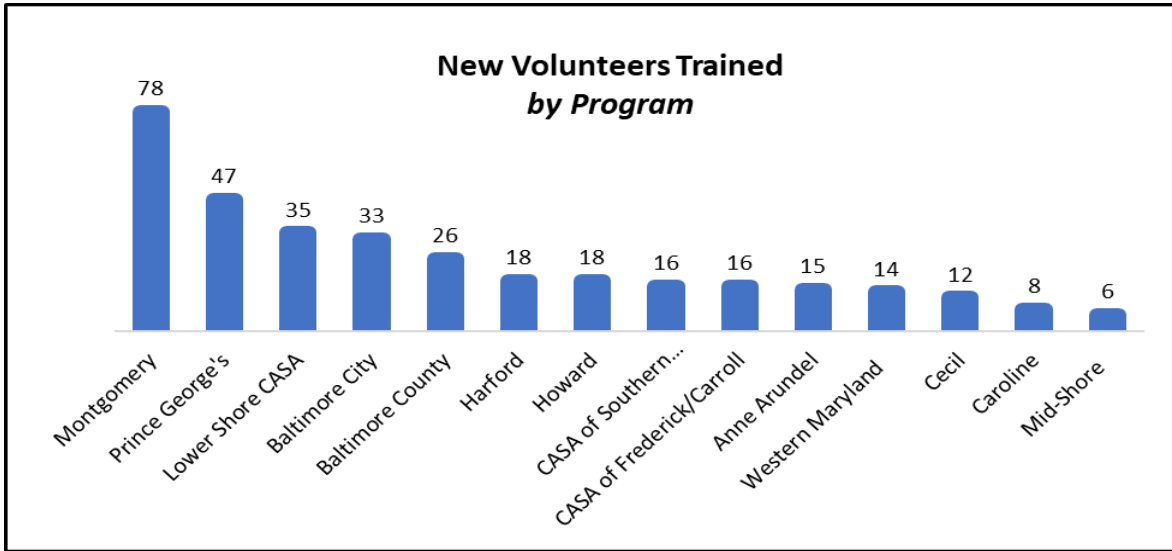
Volunteer applications received: 643. Although programs received fewer inquiries than received in prior years, the programs had a slight (3.5%) increase in applications received.

Prospective volunteers interviewed: 543. Programs interviewed 85 percent of the prospective volunteers who submitted applications. This is a small (6.2%) increase over the number of interviews conducted in Fiscal Year 2022.

2. Training

Pre-service training:

In Fiscal Year 2023, 342 new volunteers completed pre-service training. The number of volunteers trained in Fiscal Year 2023 decreased by 16 percent from Fiscal Year 2022 and is the lowest number in the twelve years we have been tracking this information. Only three programs had increases in the number of volunteers trained: Caroline County (+5), Howard County (+2), and Harford County (+1).



In-service training (continuing education): CASA programs provided 815 hours of ongoing training to active volunteers. CASA volunteers are required to complete twelve hours of in-service training per year. Many training opportunities are now provided virtually, which has helped to increase attendance.

3. Service

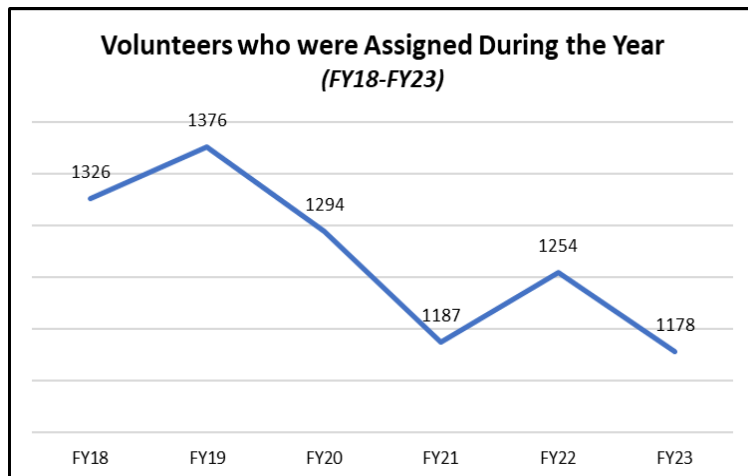
Every CASA program aims to provide a volunteer for every child who is adjudicated as a child in need of assistance (CINA). In Carroll, Dorchester, Howard, Kent, Queen Anne’s, Talbot, and Worcester counties, the programs have provided CASA volunteers for nearly all CINA children. There are exceptions 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.

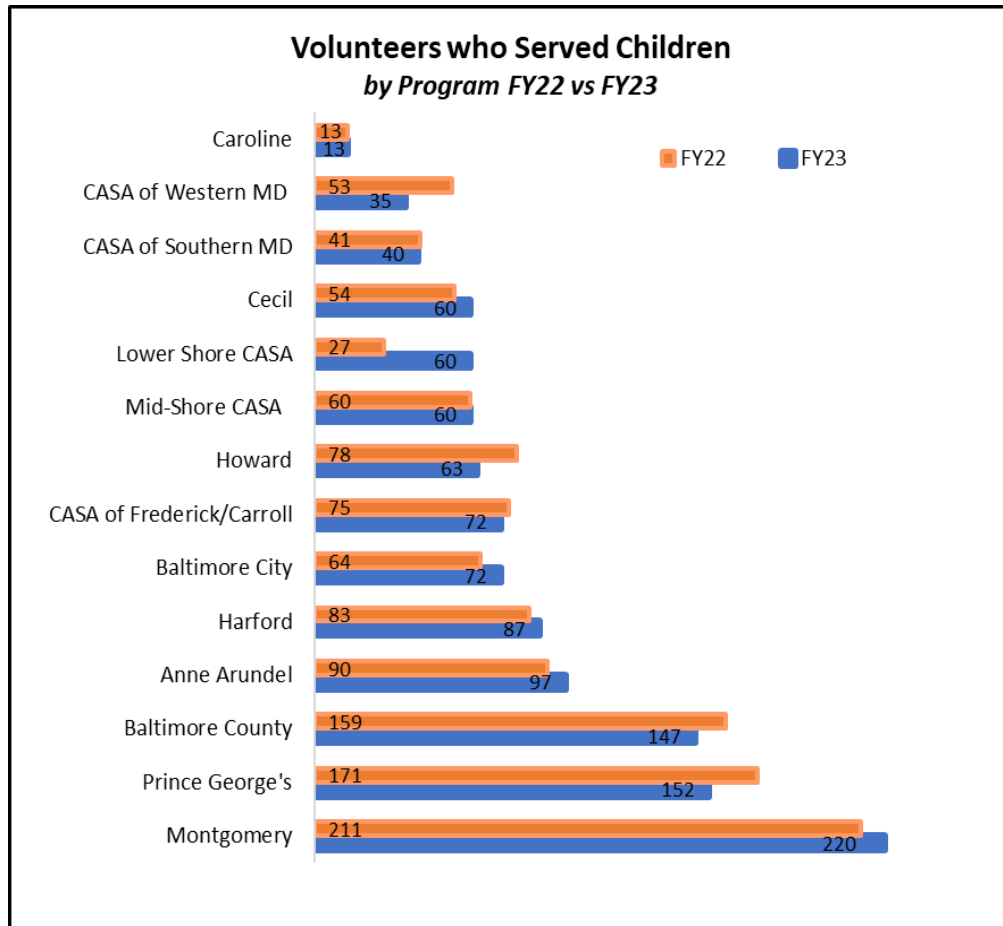
Volunteers serving children in FY23: 1,178.

This number includes all volunteers who served children during the year. There was a decrease of 76 volunteers (6%).

Volunteers serving children on the last day of FY23: 918.

Overall, the number of CASA advocates serving children on the last day of Fiscal Year 2023 decreased by 45 (nearly 5%) over the last day of Fiscal Year 2022.





4. Volunteer Demographics

Gender Identity

Male	14.2%
Female	85.5%
Non-Binary	0.3%

Age

21-29	11.4%
30-39	16.7%
40-49	17.6%
50-59	21.1%
60 + above	33.2%

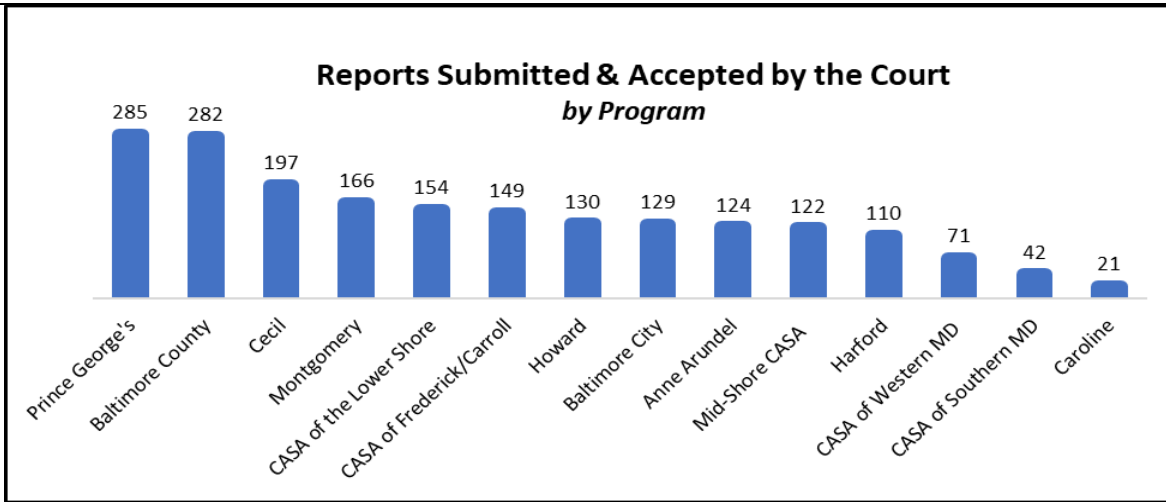
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.2%
Asian or Asian American	2.4%
Black or African American	24.7%
Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin	5.3%
Middle Eastern or North African	0.3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.3%
White	62.9%
Two or More Races and/or Ethnicities	2.6%
Other	1.2%
Education	
High School/GED	4.4%
Some College	7.8%
College	40.6%
Post-Grad	35.1%
Unknown	12.1%
Employment Status	
Full-time	54.3%
Part-time	11.7%
Retired	14.3%
Unemployed	3.8%
Unknown	15.3%
Other	0.6%

5. Advocacy

CASA volunteers advocate in court for the best interests of the children they are assigned to help. 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 CASA program support, the volunteer prepares a report that 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. At a minimum, these hearings occur every six months. Many courts schedule more frequent reviews.

Court reports submitted by CASA and accepted by the court: 1,982.

This is a decline of 44 reports from Fiscal Year 2022.

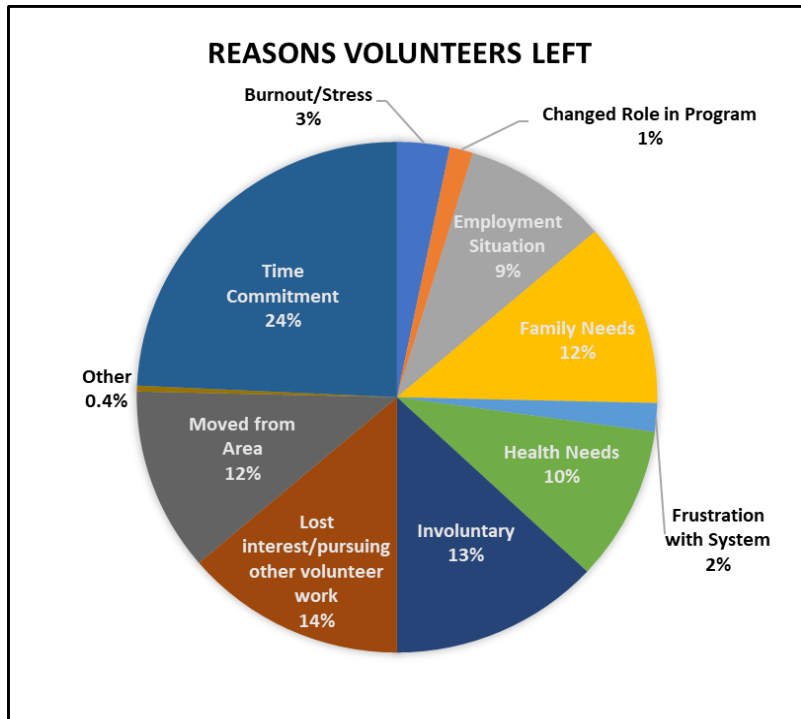


Volunteer rate of attendance at court: 79%. CASA volunteers attended 79 percent of the hearings for which they prepared a report. This rate is often affected by continuances; a volunteer may appear for the initial hearing but be unavailable to attend on the rescheduled date. CASA staff attend all hearings for which the programs have an assigned advocate.

6. 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 66.5 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 programs: 267. This is a decrease of 37 volunteers over Fiscal Year 2022 when 304 volunteers left the programs. Like Fiscal Year 2022, “time commitment” remains the most common reason volunteers left the programs. The time commitment includes regular visits with the child, meeting with all the people involved in the child’s life and preparing regular reports for the court. Volunteers often find it difficult to juggle their CASA responsibilities with other obligations.



Many volunteers take a break after their assigned case closes but do not leave the program. At the end of Fiscal Year 2023, the programs reported 406 volunteers “on leave.” In Fiscal Year 2023, 224 of these experienced volunteers were assigned a second case.

Average length of service (volunteers who left): 34.9 months. Volunteers are required to commit 12 months to serving their assigned child. On average, volunteers who left their program in Fiscal Year 2023 served for nearly three years. At CASA of the Mid-Shore, the average time of service for the 5 volunteers who left was five years.

B. Children

At the end of Fiscal Year 2023, 3,928 children were in foster care in Maryland in counties served by CASA programs. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#)). This is a decrease of 286 children from the prior year. Approximately 36 percent of children in out-of-home placement received the benefit of CASA advocacy.

1. Children Served by a Volunteer Advocate in FY23: 1,431

This is an increase of 31 children from Fiscal Year 2022.

2. Children Being Served by a Volunteer on the Last Day of FY23: 1,032

This is an increase of 20 children from Fiscal Year 2022.

3. Details about Children Served in FY23:

Nearly 50 percent of children served in Fiscal Year 2023 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 that help prepare them to be independent.

Average Age of Children Served by County	
<i>by County</i>	
5	Dorchester, Somerset
7	Caroline
8	Allegheny, Worcester
9	Cecil, Howard
10	Anne Arundel, Calvert, Carroll, Charles, Harford, Kent, St. Mary's, Talbot
11	Washington, Wicomico
12	Baltimore County, Frederick
13	Montgomery
14	Prince George's, Queen Anne's
16	Baltimore City

4. Children Demographics

Gender Identity

Male	50.3%
Female	49.5%
Non-Binary	0.1%
Prefer to Self-Describe	0.1%

Age

Birth to 2	9.3%
3 to 6	17.0%
7 to 13	25.3%
14 to 17	26.9%
18 +	21.5%

Race/Ethnicity

American Indian / Alaska Native	0.0%
Asian / Asian American	1.8%
Black / African American	42.6%
Hispanic / Latino	7.6%
Indian	0.3%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	0.0%
White	33.6%
Two or more races	14.1%

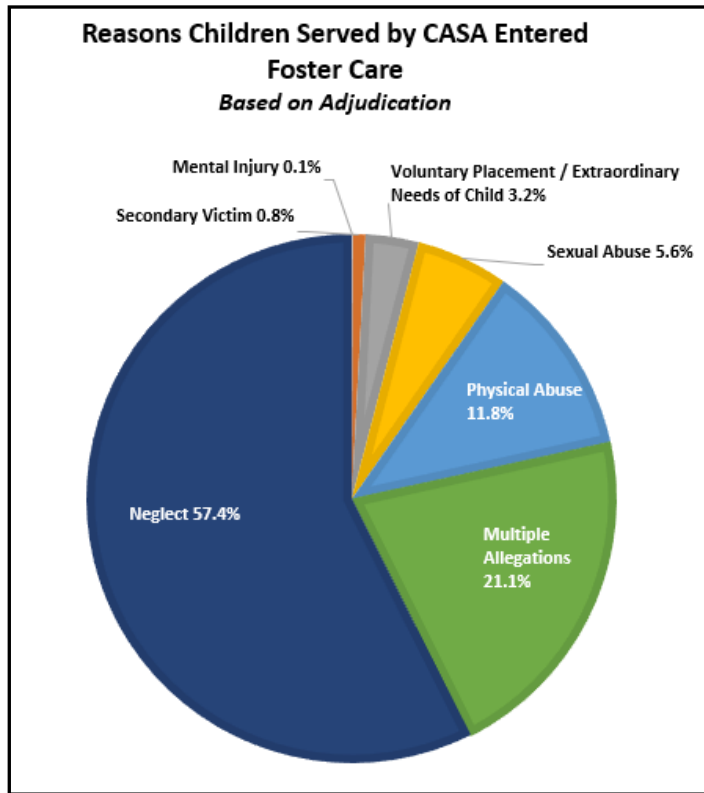
To understand the children CASA is serving beyond the core demographics above, it is helpful to know some additional information about them and the challenges they face. Statewide, 23 percent of children with an assigned volunteer on the last day of Fiscal Year 2023 had a plan of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement “APPLA.” This is the plan assigned to children when all other options have been ruled out. Children with APPLA plans are most likely to age-out to independence without permanency. With 67 percent at CASA/Prince George’s County and 69 percent at CASA of Western Maryland, these two programs have the highest rate of children with APPLA plans. The lowest is Caroline, with only one child having an APPLA plan. Serving children with APPLA plans is generally more challenging. Because these children are most likely to be in foster care until they are twenty-one, it is more likely that they will have more than one CASA volunteer and multiple placements. In these cases, CASA volunteers play an important role in making sure the youth they serve are prepared for independence.

Forty-four percent of youth served in Fiscal Year 2023 had a physical, development, cognitive, or mental health condition. Thirty-nine percent of these youth had a mental health diagnosis. The highest percentages were found in Frederick, 93%, Kent, 83%, Somerset, 75%, Prince George’s, 73%, and Harford, 67%. CASA volunteers are especially crucial in these cases where children are often being moved from placement to placement, and school to school, and the child’s health history often gets overlooked if no one is advocating for the child’s treatment needs.

Of the children served in Fiscal Year 2023, 36 percent had at least one parent whose substance abuse was a contributing factor to their initial involvement with the Department of Social Services (DSS). This can be difficult for most parents to overcome and becomes a barrier to reunification.

Due to the lack of appropriate placement options in some counties, 35 percent of foster youth served by CASA are placed outside of the jurisdiction from which they were removed. This percentage is much higher in Dorchester, 78%, Talbot 67%, Howard, 64%, Frederick, 63%. Serving youth placed outside of the program’s county can make it difficult to find and retain volunteers who are able to see the child regularly. Additionally, it can make it difficult for children to maintain ties with their biological family and community.

Reasons for entering care: Neglect is the most-commonly adjudicated reason that children served by CASA enter foster care, accounting for 57.4 percent of cases in Fiscal Year 2023. “Neglect” includes abandonment and educational/medical/physical neglect. Neglect is commonly the reason children with substance-abusing parents come into care.



5. Case Closures

CASA programs closed 397 cases in Fiscal Year 2023. Of those, 369 cases were closed by the court, and 28 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 just over three years, with 165 youth served by CASA spending three years or more in care and eight youth spending more than 10 years in foster care. Sixty-five youth spent one year or less in foster care before their case closed.

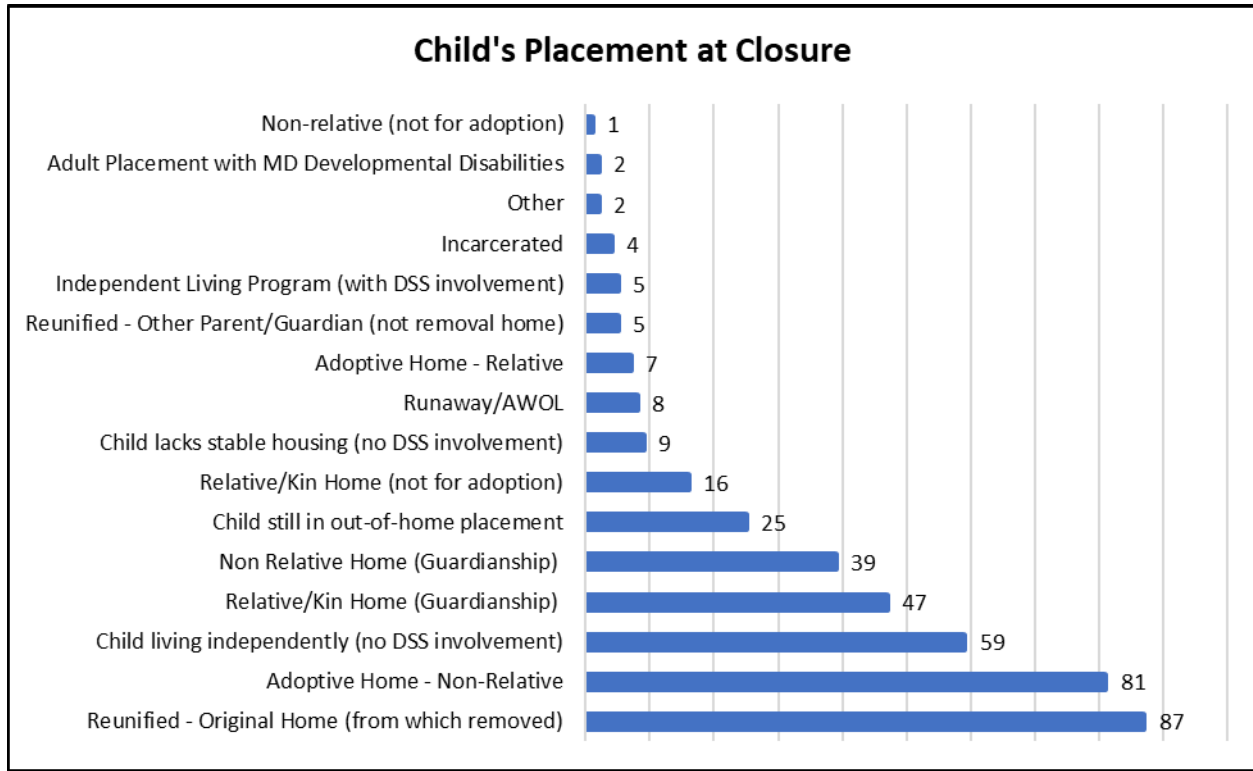
Average length of time in foster care for closed cases:			
County	# of Closed Cases	Months	Years
Prince George's	50	58.7	4.9
Harford	46	33.0	2.7
Anne Arundel	44	44.0	3.7
Baltimore County	42	42.2	3.5
Montgomery	41	39.0	3.3
Cecil	25	25.0	2.1
Allegany	20	13.0	1.1
Frederick	18	46.9	2.1
Carroll	17	20.3	1.7
Baltimore City	16	99.0	8.3
Howard	14	30.7	2.6
Worcester	12	15.5	1.3
Caroline	10	43.8	3.7
Wicomico	9	7.5	0.6
Charles	6	41.7	3.5
Queen Anne's	6	34.3	2.9
Dorchester	5	50.4	4.2
Calvert	4	35.0	2.9
Kent	4	27.5	2.3
Talbot	3	19.3	1.6
St. Mary's	3	33.7	2.8
Washington	2	42.0	3.5
Statewide	396	39.5	3.29

Placements at Court Closure

Permanent placements: In Fiscal Year 2023, 86 percent of children whose cases were closed by the court 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, 47 percent were reunified or placed with family members. Of those reunified with their family, 59 percent went home to their parent(s) and 41 percent went to live with other relatives.

Non-permanent placement: Fifty-six children were living in “non-permanent” living situations at closure. These include thirty youth who were over 18 and remained in out-of-home placements or independent living programs through the Department of Social Services. Twenty-one youth

were over the age of 18 and were out of contact, had run-away, were living with friends or in other unstable housing situations. Two youth were placed in programs for adults with disabilities, and three were incarcerated.



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 2023 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 **18.2 fewer months in care** than children who were assigned to CASA during CINA review or permanency planning hearings. **This is more than a one year and six-month reduction in the time children spend in care.**
- 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.
- In Fiscal Year 2023, children assigned to CASA before their case reached the review stage were **twice as likely to be in a permanent placement** when their case closed. Forty-five percent of these children were reunited with a parent or guardian or placed with other family members.

IV. CASA in the Coming Year

As we look forward to the new year, the Maryland CASA Association is once again in transition. As its leadership reorganizes and seeks a new director, the local CASA programs continue to work tirelessly, advocating for the best interests of children in the State's care. As the climate for volunteerism continues to change, so will the programs. They will need to seek new avenues of recruitment and implement new ways to retain the volunteers they have. CASA programs are committed to increasing statewide capacity to serve more children and to support more volunteer advocates, thereby further helping the courts with critically important decisions about the best interests of the youth served.

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.