

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

Fiscal Year 2025



**Administrative Office of the Courts
February 2026**

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

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I. Overview

Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs operate in Maryland subject to Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article, § 3-830, which states that the CASA will:

- (1) Provide the court with background information to aid 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. To understand the child's needs, the CASA volunteer meets the key people in the child's life and develops a trusting relationship with the child. Their consistent presence can have a long-term positive impact as illustrated by these stories shared by our Eastern Shore programs:

From Lower Shore CASA:

The program's longest serving volunteer (16 years), worked with a young lady who had been sexually abused and moved between multiple foster homes, guardians, and case managers. As a result of this lack of consistency, she trusted no one. The CASA volunteer scheduled visits and each time the young woman would slam the door in her face. Months passed with no progress, but the volunteer remained vigilant. Finally, the young woman begrudgingly agreed to speak with the volunteer. During that initial conversation, both realized that they had multiple things in common. The child's walls began to come down, and over time, the volunteer developed a relationship with the child. The volunteer remained the first consistent adult in this child's life and advocated for her needs in court and with the other adults in the child's life. With CASA's support, the young woman went on to graduate high school and college and become a teacher. She is now married with children of her own, and she has chosen to remain in contact with her CASA volunteer. When her life was in turmoil, the volunteer brought her internal peace and taught her how to trust again.

From CASA of the Mid-Shore:

A CASA volunteer is appointed to work with a female teen who was removed from her parents' care after suffering many years of abuse. The volunteer learned that the youth was interested in learning to ride a bicycle, so the volunteer located bicycles and started teaching her to ride. Through this activity, the volunteer saw her struggle with physical coordination and noticed that the young woman was unable to lift either leg high enough to mount the bike. This difficulty echoed a prior incident the CASA had observed when the youth tripped while walking and appeared unable to break her fall with her hands. She also spoke about struggling in Physical Education class and experiencing muscle soreness afterward. The CASA volunteer's concerns deepened during a later visit to a local art museum, where the CASA noticed the youth physically lifting her leg to get into the car and becoming fatigued after climbing a single flight of stairs. The CASA volunteer advocated for the medical attention needed and the child was referred to a rheumatologist, who immediately admitted her to Children's Hospital for comprehensive testing. She was

diagnosed with dermatomyositis, an autoimmune condition characterized by rashes and muscle weakness. While lifelong, the condition can be managed with medication, IV treatments, and physical therapy. This child is receiving the medical care she needs because of the advocacy of the CASA volunteer.

As these stories show, the consistent presence of a CASA volunteer can change the course of a child’s life. With so many adults in and out of their lives, CASAs often become the only consistent and reliable presence. The strength of those relationships enables CASA volunteers to make well-informed and meaningful recommendations to the court that serve the best interest of the child. With the help of CASA volunteers, the court is empowered with the information it needs to make decisions that serve the child.

II. Program Operations

A. Counties Served

CASA programs were active in 23 Maryland jurisdictions in Fiscal Year 2025, serving all jurisdictions except Garrett County.

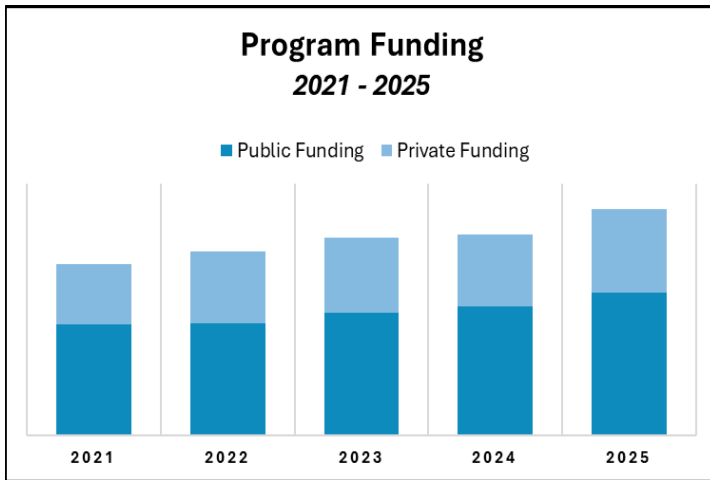
Programs by Service Area and Start Date

| Programs (<i>Official Names</i>) | County/Counties Served | Start Date |
|--|--|------------------------------|
| Voices for Children Montgomery (Formerly CASA of Montgomery County) | Montgomery | 1987 |
| CASA of Baltimore City | Baltimore City | 1988 |
| CASA of the Mid-Shore (CASA of Talbot, but now doing business as “CASA of the Mid-Shore”) Expanded to Dorchester County in 2010 and to Queen Anne’s and Kent counties in 2014. | Talbot Kent Queen Anne’s Dorchester | 1990 2009 2009 2010 |
| 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 (Formerly active from 1991-1995) | Prince George’s | 2001 |
| CASA of Baltimore County | Baltimore | 2002 |
| 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 |
| CASA of Western Maryland (formerly CASA of Allegany County) (Washington County was a program of the | Allegany Washington | 2013 2021 |

0.7% **Other Public Sources**
*(AOC – Foster Care Court Improvement Project Federal Sub-Grants,
 GOCPP - Children's Justice Act)*

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

9.8% **Special Events**
8.2% **Other Private Sources**
8.1% **Foundations/Private Grants**
6.7% **Individual Contributions**
1.2% **Corporate Contributions**
1.3% **Product Sales & Other Fundraising Activities**
0.7% **United Way/CFC/Maryland Charity Campaign**
0.7% **Groups & Organizations**
0.3% **National CASA**



Program income continues to grow. Public funding has increased by 10.6% percent and private funding increased by 15.7%, a total increase of \$887,183. All but one program increased funding from both public and private sources. There was a 3.8% increase in Other Private Sources resulting from a CASA Prince George’s County’s public-private partnership which provided \$480,000 in funding to support guaranteed basic income for aging-out youth.

C. Staffing

Although there are 93 positions in CASA programs statewide, AOC - JFS grant funding only contributes to the salary and fringe costs of 69 positions.

Total Positions: 93

Full time: 59 Part time: 34

Based on the total working hours, the Full-Time-Equivalency (FTE) for all positions is 78.1 full-time positions.

Total Positions Supervising Volunteers: 54

Full time: 29 Part time: 25

Based on the total working hours, the Full-Time-Equivalency (FTE) for positions supervising volunteers is 41.3 full-time positions.

D. Statewide Organization

Although CASA programs operate as individualized separate entities, they are united by their common goal of effectively serving Maryland’s youth in care. In the past, the Maryland CASA Association served as a unifying organization providing technical support, on-boarding of new directors, legislative advocacy, marketing support, program reviews, training for staff and volunteers, and meeting other statewide needs as determined by the programs. While the current Maryland CASA Association provides some training, they no longer serve all the programs, do not provide technical support, and did not receive JFS grant funding in fiscal years 2024 or 2025.

To fill the gaps left by the formerly active Maryland CASA Association, the programs meet as a network monthly to support each other and provide guidance and technical assistance to newer program leadership. In Fiscal Year 2025, JFS staff also stepped in where needed, filling gaps in training and helping programs to use the “Optima” CASA database.

III. Program Activities

A. Volunteers

The nationwide decline in volunteerism that started with the pandemic continues. Nonprofits organizations that rely on volunteers to operate are feeling the negative effects of this decline. To ensure that children continue to receive the benefit of CASA services, the Cecil County, Prince George’s County, and Baltimore City programs are piloting the use of paid staff to serve as an advocate for youth who would otherwise go unserved.

The Cecil County CASA pilot has been underway for more than five years. They have titled their paid advocate "Mobile CASA" because they typically serve youth placed outside of the county or youth who require a higher level of commitment than most volunteers are able to provide. The population that the Mobile CASA works with is one that is difficult to match with a volunteer and enables the program to serve all children assigned by the court. Since this role often works with youth experiencing similar issues (LGBTQIA+ population, criminal justice interactions, mental illness, housing insecurity) the Mobile CASA can focus their knowledge base on these specific topics.

In Prince George’s County, the paid advocate pilot is just beginning. They are piloting the model with 25 cases that are hard to match with the traditional CASA volunteer. These cases often involve youth who are detained, are primarily Spanish-speaking, are medically fragile, or who live in geographically challenging areas where travel time limits volunteer capacity. Case Supervisors serving as paid advocates contact the youth and/or placement at least once per month, gathering information, and submitting a specialized court report for the cases included in the pilot. Their goal is to include the number and quality of advocacy for youth who are currently under-served within the traditional volunteer-based framework.

Baltimore City also implemented a paid advocate program during Fiscal Year 2025. Similar to the paid advocates in Cecil and Prince George’s counties, this position serves youth who are the most difficult to assign. These are children placed in faraway locations or children with extreme challenges who may be difficult for a traditional volunteer to manage. The Baltimore City paid advocate is currently serving ten children.

The results from the pilot programs are promising. Baltimore City and Cecil County report services being provided to youth in far-reaching placements that would not have otherwise received assistance. Prince George’s County reports success serving bilingual youth placed in non-bilingual placements and assistance with administrative and bureaucratic issues that are often very difficult, time consuming, and not easy for a traditional volunteer to navigate.

As the programs continue to refine and implement this new type of advocacy, JFS has developed statistical and narrative reporting tools to evaluate the success of these pilots. We are hopeful that the paid advocate model will continue to prove successful and can be replicated in other programs.

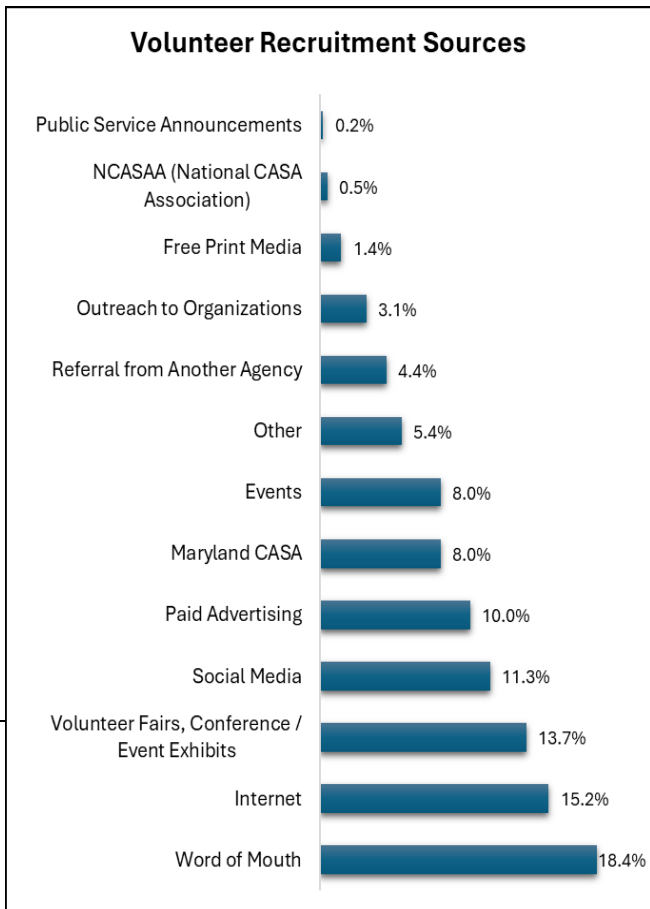
1. Recruitment

In Fiscal Year 2025, CASA programs statewide received 1,969 volunteer inquiries. This was a decrease of twenty-five inquiries compared to Fiscal Year 2024. Over the past three years, volunteer recruitment inquiries have remained stagnant. This may be due in part to the greater accessibility of information and volunteer applications online. Volunteers no longer need to contact the program directly to get information, so inquiries are more difficult to track.

The most successful source of volunteer inquiries in Fiscal Year 2025 was word of mouth followed closely by the internet. Ninety-six percent of the volunteers’ inquiries resulting from paid advertisements were in Prince George’s County. Overall, Prince George’s County received 30% of the volunteer inquiries reported and the most in the state.

The nearly 27% of volunteers who reached their local CASA program through online resources did so through Google searches, program websites, websites such as Idealist and Volunteer Match, and through social media outlets such as Facebook, X, and Instagram.

These sources grow every year while other sources including the National and Maryland CASA Associations steadily decline. Referrals from the Maryland



CASA Association declined from 17.5% in Fiscal Year 2022 to 8.4% in Fiscal Year 2025.

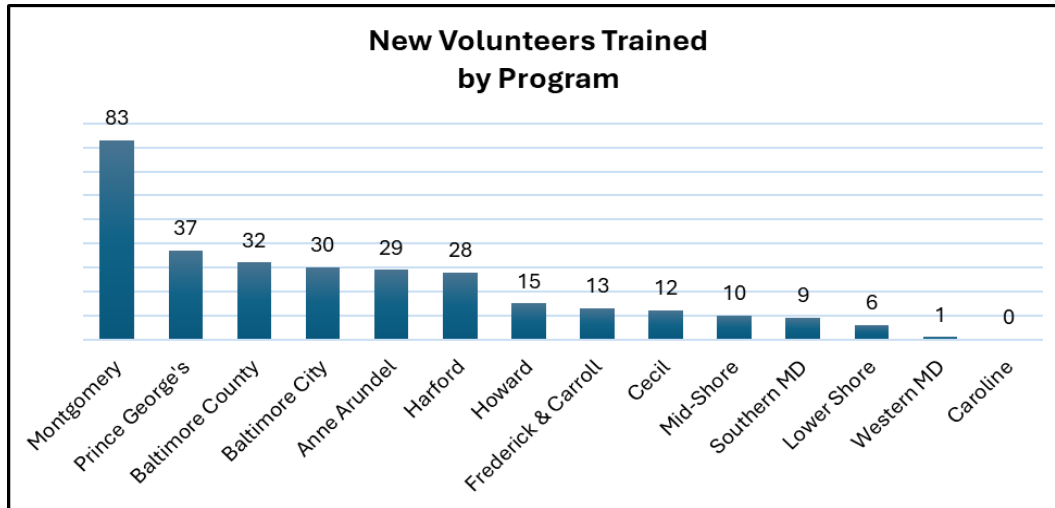
Volunteer applications received: 634. Programs received 37% more applications than in Fiscal Year 2024.

Prospective volunteers interviewed: 468. Programs interviewed 74% of the prospective volunteers who submitted applications. This is a 30% increase from the 359 interviews conducted in Fiscal Year 2024. All programs except Western Maryland received more applications and interviewed more prospective volunteers in Fiscal Year 2025 compared to the previous year. The most significant increases were in Baltimore City (+25), Baltimore County (+30), and Montgomery County (+33).

2. Training

Pre-service training:

In Fiscal Year 2025, 305 new volunteers completed pre-service training. The number of volunteers trained in Fiscal Year 2025 increased by 7% from Fiscal Year 2024. In Fiscal Year 2024, programs trained the lowest number of volunteers in the fourteen years we have been tracking this information. This number is now moving in a positive direction but is still the second lowest number of volunteers trained in recent years. Three programs had notable increases in the number of volunteers trained: Baltimore City (+9), Anne Arundel County (+14), and Montgomery County (+14).



In-service training (continuing education): CASA programs provided 596 hours of ongoing training to active volunteers. This is a 21% increase from Fiscal Year 2024. CASA volunteers are required to complete 12 hours of in-service training per year. Many training opportunities are now provided virtually, leading to increased attendance.

3. Service

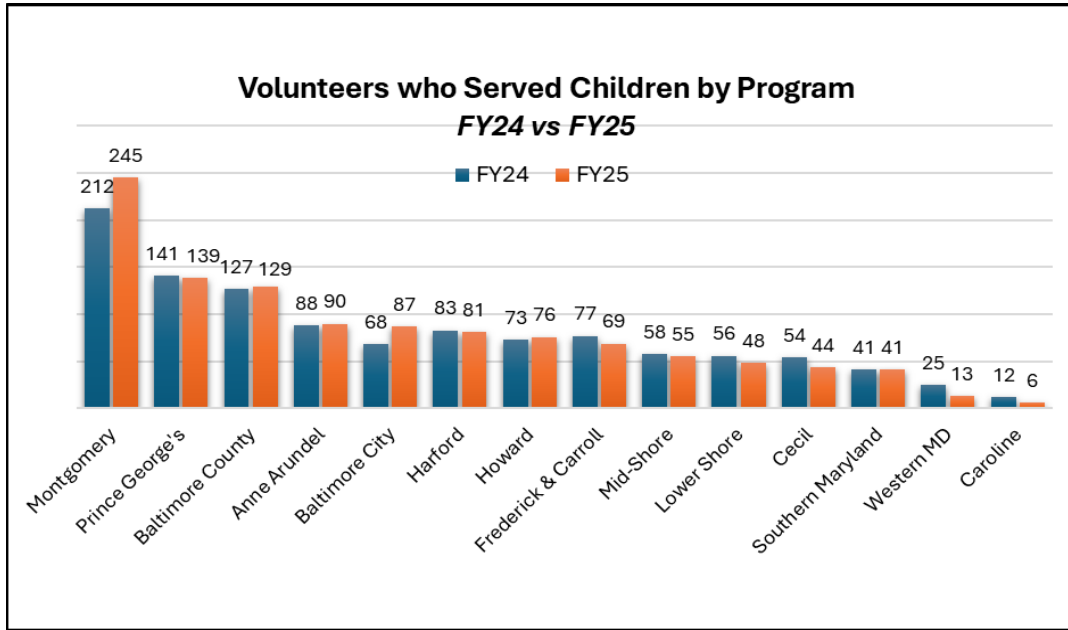
Volunteers serving children in FY25: 1,123.

This number includes all volunteers who served children during the year, including volunteers who remain active and volunteers who have left their program. There was an increase of 8 volunteers from Fiscal Year 2024.

Volunteers serving children on the last day of FY25: 885.

Overall, the number of CASA advocates serving children on the last day of Fiscal Year 2025 decreased by 18 compared to the last day of Fiscal Year 2024.

4.



Volunteer Demographics

Gender Identity

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Male | 14.9% |
| Female | 84.5% |
| Non-Binary | 0.5% |
| Prefer not to say | 0.1% |

Age

| | |
|------------|-------|
| 21-29 | 10.3% |
| 30-39 | 17.4% |
| 40-49 | 18.3% |
| 50-59 | 21.8% |
| 60 + above | 32.2% |

Race/Ethnicity

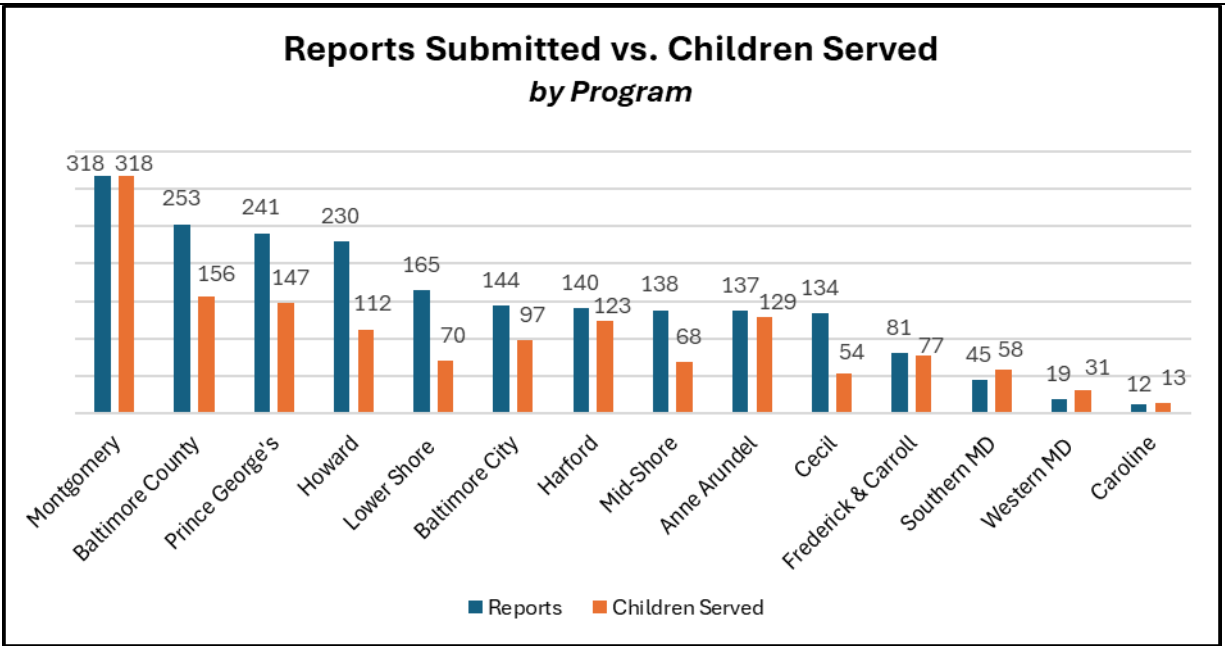
| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 0.7% |
| Asian or Asian American | 3.0% |
| Black or African American | 26.3% |
| Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin | 5.8% |
| Middle Eastern or North African | 1.0% |

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 0.4% |
| White | 60.1% |
| Two or More Races and/or Ethnicities | 2.5% |
| Other | 0.3% |
| Education | |
| High School/GED | 4.2% |
| Some College | 7.7% |
| College | 39.8% |
| Post-Grad | 39.3% |
| Unknown | 8.9% |
| Employment Status | |
| Full-time | 60.4% |
| Part-time | 12.4% |
| Retired | 16.2% |
| Unemployed | 2.2% |
| Unknown | 8.1% |
| Other | 0.8% |

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 the CASA program’s 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: 2,057. This is a decrease of 94 reports from Fiscal Year 2024. On average, programs submitted 1.4 reports for each child served in Fiscal Year 2025. However, as demonstrated by the chart below, the number of reports and hearings can vary dramatically from court to court. At CASA of the Mid-Shore, 138 reports were submitted for 68 children (2.02 per child), while Montgomery County submitted 318 reports for 318 children (1.00 per child).



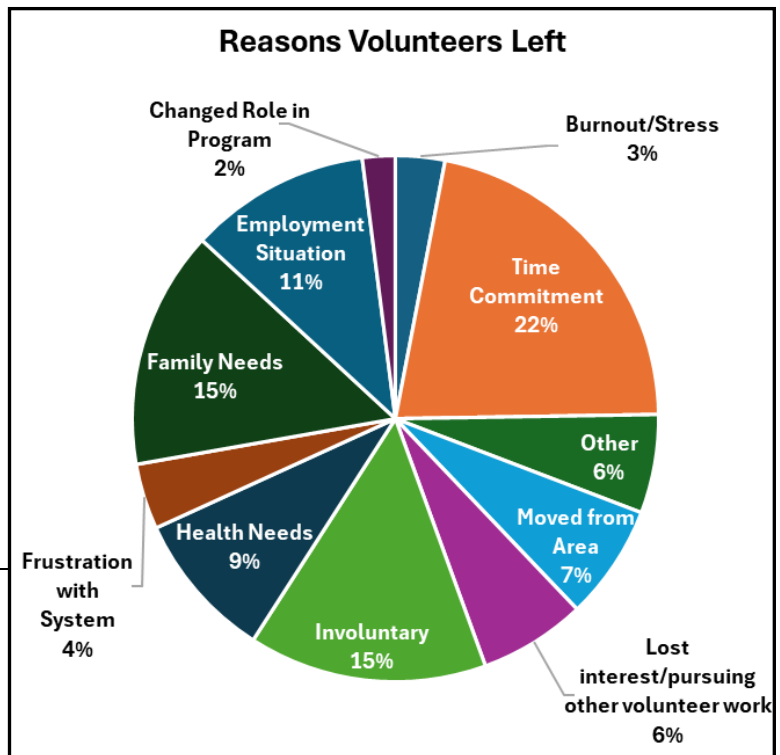
Volunteer rate of attendance at court: 76%. CASA volunteers attended 76% of the hearings for which they prepared a report. This rate is often affected by continuances; a volunteer may appear for the initial hearing but be unavailable to attend on the rescheduled date. CASA staff attend all hearings for 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 70% of the volunteers who were serving children on the last day of the Fiscal Year had been serving for 12 months or longer. This is a 9% decrease from Fiscal Year 2024.

Volunteers who left the programs:

172. This is a decrease of 13 volunteers from Fiscal Year 2024 when 185 volunteers left the programs. “Time commitment” remains the most common reason volunteers leave. The volunteer 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 2025, the programs reported 361 volunteers “on leave.” In Fiscal Year 2025, 76 experienced volunteers were assigned a second case, this is a decrease of 147 volunteers from Fiscal Year 2024 when 223 experienced volunteers took a second case.

Average length of service (volunteers who left): 38.27 months. Volunteers are required to commit 12 months to serving their assigned child. On average, volunteers who left their program in Fiscal Year 2025 served for three years and four months. At CASA of the Mid-Shore, Lower Shore CASA, and CASA of Frederick/Voices for Children of Carroll, the average time of service for the five volunteers who left was nearly five years. At CASA of the Mid-Shore, one Talbot County volunteer served for more than nine years.

B. Children

As Maryland’s Department of Human Services focuses on short-term, home-based programs designed to preserve and improve family relationships and prevent out-of-home placements for children, the number of children entering the foster care system continues to decline. According to DHS, there are about 3,800 Maryland children in out-of-home care. ([Out-Of-Home Care - Maryland Department of Human Services](#)). CASA continues to provide advocacy for approximately 36 percent of these children.

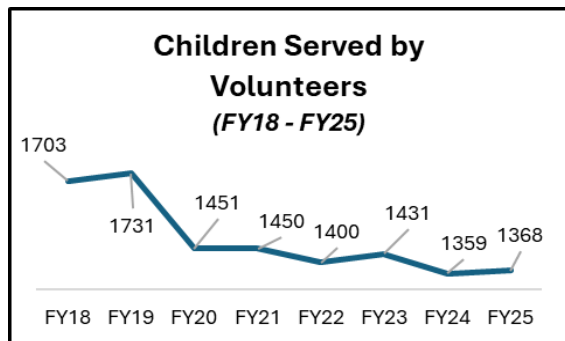
1. Children Served by a Volunteer Advocate in Fiscal Year 2025: 1,368

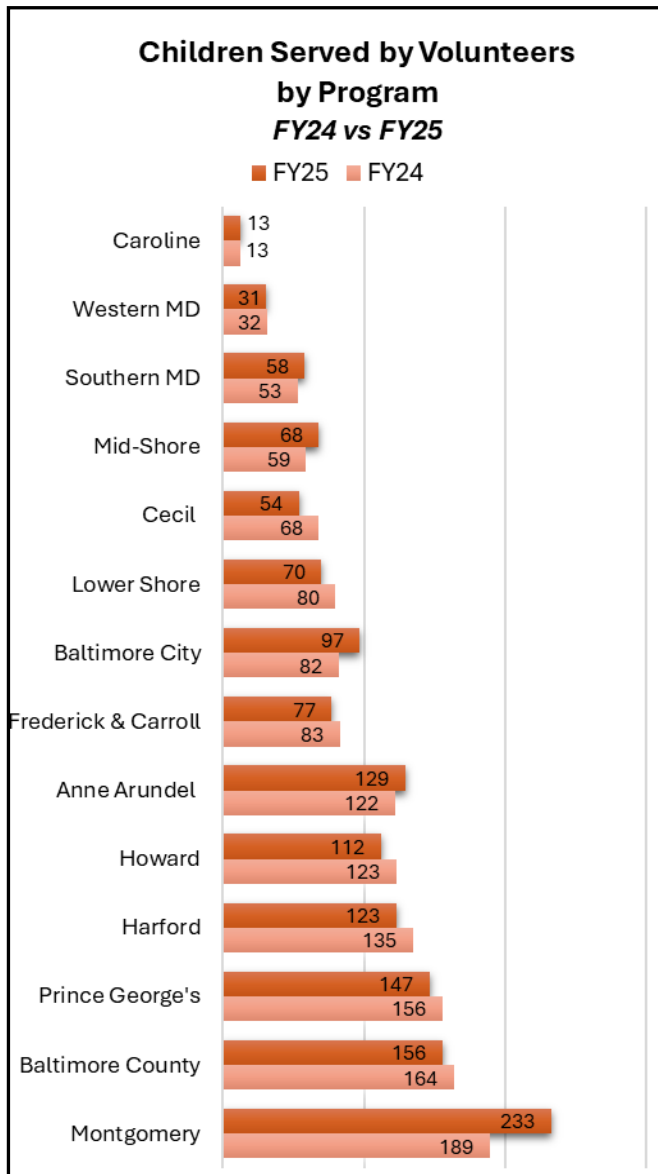
This is an increase of 9 children from Fiscal Year 2024.

Despite the overall 1.6% decrease, there were notable increases in several programs. Montgomery County served 23% more children in Fiscal Year 2025 than in Fiscal Year 2024. Baltimore City increased by 18% and CASA of the Mid-Shore increased by 15%.

2. Children Being Served by a Volunteer on the Last Day of Fiscal Year 2025: 948

This is a decrease of 15 children from Fiscal Year 2024.





3. Details about Children Served in Fiscal Year 2025
 Nearly 50% of children served in Fiscal Year 2025 were 13 years of age 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 plans in place to help prepare them to be independent.

| | |
|----|--|
| 7 | Caroline, Somerset |
| 8 | Dorchester |
| 9 | Anne Arundel, Carroll, Charles |
| 10 | Harford |
| 11 | Calvert, Howard, St. Mary's, Washington |
| 12 | Allegany, Cecil, Frederick |
| 13 | Baltimore County, Kent, Montgomery, Wicomico |
| 14 | Kent, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, Talbot |
| 16 | Baltimore City |

Children Demographics

| Gender Identity | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| Male | 52.4% |
| Female | 47.6% |
| Non-Binary | 0.0% |
| Prefer to Self-Describe | 0.0% |
| Age | |
| Birth to 2 | 7.8% |
| 3 to 6 | 13.4% |
| 7 to 13 | 27.1% |
| 14 to 17 | 28.5% |
| 18 + | 23.3% |
| Race/Ethnicity | |
| American Indian / Alaska Native | 0.0% |
| Asian / Asian American | 1.3% |

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Black / African American | 42.0% |
| Hispanic / Latino | 10.4% |
| Middle Eastern or North African | 0.0% |
| Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander | 0.0% |
| White | 31.9% |
| Two or more races | 14.4% |

Beyond the Demographics

To understand the children CASA is serving beyond the core demographics above, it is helpful to know what brought them into the foster care system and the ongoing challenges they must overcome. This information also illustrates the key role CASA plays in helping these youth find stability and permanency.

Reasons for entering care: Neglect is the most-commonly adjudicated reason that children served by CASA enter foster care, accounting for 53% of cases in Fiscal Year 2025.

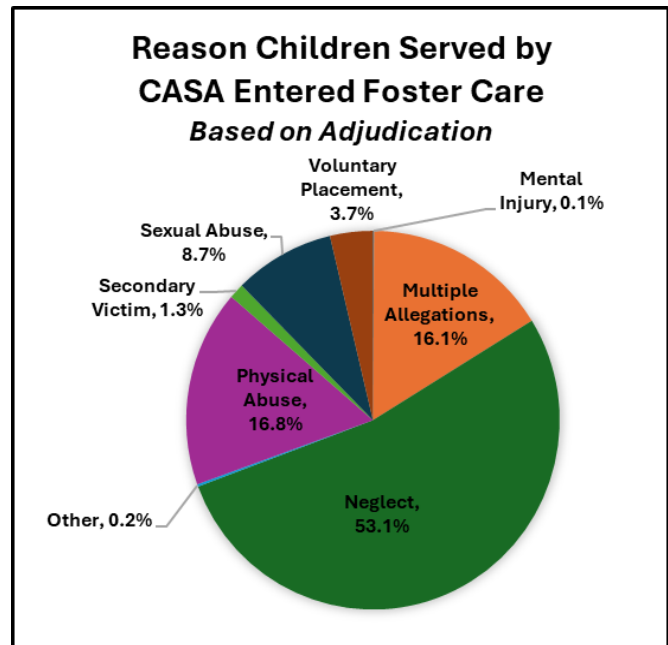
“Neglect” includes abandonment and educational/medical/physical neglect. Neglect is commonly the reason children with substance-abusing parents come into care.

The plan of last resort: Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)

Statewide, 28% of children with an assigned volunteer on the last day of Fiscal Year 2025 had a plan of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). This is a 2% decrease from Fiscal Year 2024.

APPLA 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. The programs with the highest rate of APPLA plans are also the programs serving the largest percentages of older youth. Specifically, Baltimore City (69%), Queen Anne’s County (60%), Prince George’s County (55%), and Baltimore County (42%). The lowest are Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, and Talbot counties, each with one or no child having an APPLA plan.



Serving children with APPLA plans is generally more challenging. Because these children are 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.

Mental Health Challenges

Twenty-eight percent of youth served in Fiscal Year 2025 had a mental health diagnosis. Prince George's County reported the highest number, 104, which represents 71% of the children they served. Kent County reports the highest percentage of youth with a mental health diagnosis: 83% (5 of the 6 children served in that county). 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 their treatment needs. Additionally, because CASAs regularly spend time with the child, they often notice changes in mood, disposition, or side effects of medications that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Substance Use Disorder

Of the twenty-one counties reporting this data*, 36% of children served by those counties had at least one parent whose substance use disorder was a contributing factor to their initial involvement with the Department of Social Services (DSS). The accessibility of treatment and nature of addiction makes substance use disorder difficult for most parents to overcome and a significant barrier to reunification.

* *Western Maryland did not report this data.*

Lack of Local Placements

Due to the lack of appropriate placement options in some counties, 31% of youth served by CASA were placed outside of the jurisdiction from which they were removed. At CASA of the Mid-Shore, more than 65% of children served are placed outside of the county of origin. 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.

Immigration and Language

More than half of the programs serve youth from families where either their parent, guardian, or the child was born outside of the United States. Six percent (82) of these youth face immigration challenges and 5% (67) also come from a family of origin with Limited English Proficiency. Prince George's County served the largest percentage of these youth (23% of the youth they served) with Frederick County (17%), Carroll County (10%), and Montgomery County (7%) also serving a notable number of youth with these challenges.

In today's political climate, a once-manageable challenge for these youth has escalated into a major risk factor. CASA programs are struggling with effective advocacy as immigration policies and procedures are continually changing. Immigration issues and a child or parent's inability to communicate with foster parents or other service providers can become barriers to reunification or permanency. Aging-out youth are especially vulnerable as they age out with uncertain immigration situations. JFS is hosting an immigration training for CASA staff and advocates in March 2026.

Pregnant or Parenting

In addition to many of the challenges detailed above, three percent (41) of the youth served by CASA in Fiscal Year 2025 were either pregnant or parenting their own child. Some of these parents do not have custody of their child, but in many circumstances the parent and

child may be placed together. As a CASA appointed to a child who is a parent, the CASA’s primary duty remains to be the best interest of their assigned child.

Gender Identity and Sexuality

Gender identity and sexuality are under-identified and under-reported by the programs.

Programs only reported 5.8% of youth they served as identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (or Queer), Intersexual or Asexual (LGBTQIA), with four programs reporting zero youth identifying as LGBTQIA. Multiple studies place the number of LGBTQIA youth at 30-35% of the foster population and 10-15% of the general population. Programs struggle with tracking and reporting this data as it is not routinely collected. Additionally, most children being served are at an age where their identity is still being developed. Despite the lack of data, we do know that these youth face a greater risk of abuse, mental health disorder, and are more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.

JFS is hosting a training for programs in 2026 to ensure volunteers are appropriately trained to serve the needs of these youth.

5. Case Closures

CASA programs closed 388 cases in Fiscal Year 2025, a decrease of 32 cases. Of those, 378 cases were closed by the court, and 10 cases were closed by the programs, but remained open in court.

A program case 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 by jurisdiction.

Statewide, the average is just over three years, with 225 youth (60%) served by CASA spending less than three years in care and 152 youth (40%) spending three years or more in care. Ten youth spent more than 10

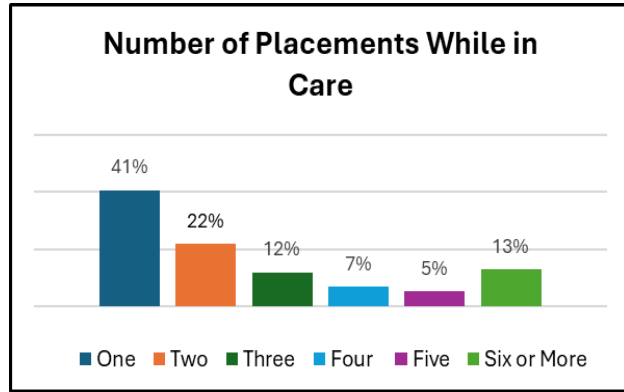
years in foster care and 54 youth spent one year or less in foster care before their case

| Average length of time in foster care for closed cases: | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|------------|
| County | # of Closed | | |
| | Cases | Months | Years |
| Prince George's | 54 | 57.4 | 4.8 |
| Anne Arundel | 51 | 27.5 | 2.3 |
| Harford | 41 | 24.5 | 2.0 |
| Baltimore County | 34 | 39.6 | 3.3 |
| Howard | 33 | 32.0 | 2.7 |
| Montgomery | 30 | 50.3 | 4.2 |
| Frederick | 24 | 22.3 | 1.9 |
| Cecil | 17 | 30.9 | 2.6 |
| Allegany | 12 | 26.3 | 2.2 |
| Baltimore City | 10 | 146.2 | 12.2 |
| Charles | 9 | 33.2 | 2.8 |
| Carroll | 8 | 43.1 | 3.6 |
| Washington | 8 | 39.5 | 3.3 |
| Calvert | 7 | 36.4 | 3.0 |
| Worcester | 7 | 16.6 | 1.4 |
| Caroline | 6 | 40.7 | 3.4 |
| Dorchester | 6 | 25.8 | 2.2 |
| St. Mary's | 6 | 47.2 | 3.9 |
| Queen Anne's | 5 | 34.8 | 2.9 |
| Somerset | 5 | 36.2 | 3.0 |
| Wicomico | 4 | 33.8 | 2.8 |
| Talbot | 1 | 12.0 | 1.0 |
| Statewide | 378 | 39.1 | 3.3 |

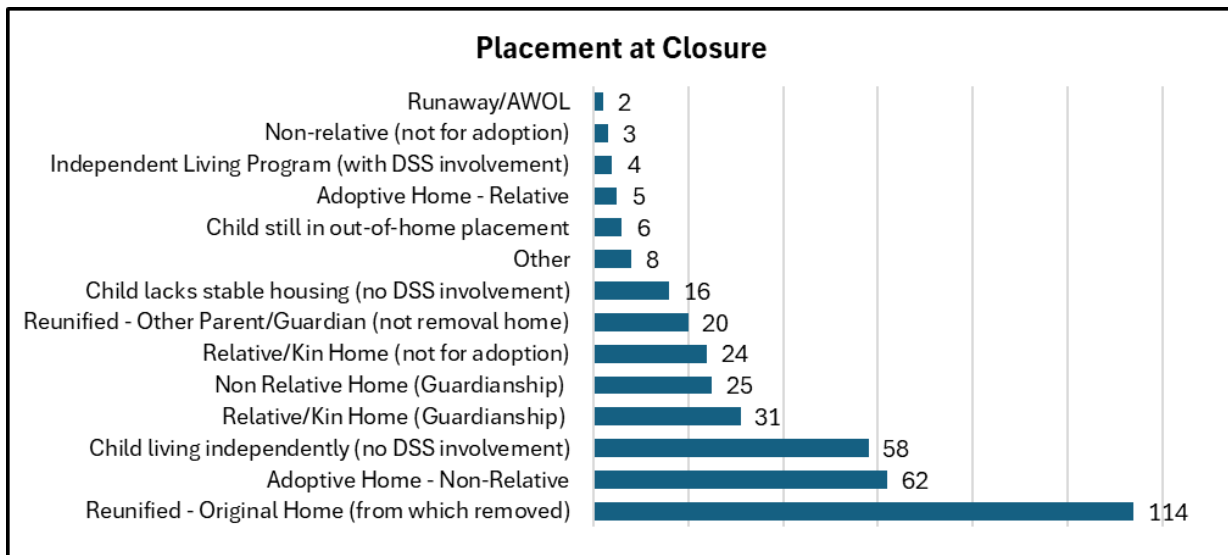
closed. One hundred and three (27%) of the cases that closed were youth 18 or older. Sixty-five (17%) closed cases were youth who were 21 years old.

Placements at Court Closure

On average, at closure, children served by CASA had 2.82 placements. At the time their case closed, 74% of children served by CASA had lived in three or fewer placements. Thirteen children lived in more than ten placements with two living in more than twenty. CASA advocates strive for stability and permanency for all children they serve.



Permanent placements: In Fiscal Year 2025, 90% of children whose cases were closed by the court were in a permanent placement at closure. For the purposes of this report, any placement that has committed to providing a legal and physical home for the child until adulthood or any young adult (over 18) living independently in a stable placement is considered permanent. Of the children served by CASA who were in a permanent placement at closure, 67% were reunified or placed with family members. Of those reunified with their family, 75% went home to their parent(s) and 25% went to live with other relatives. Sixty-seven percent of the youth who left care between ages of 18 and 21 were living independently or in other permanent placements at closure.



Non-permanent placement: Thirty-nine children were living in “non-permanent” living situations at closure. These include ten youth who remained in out-of-home placements or independent living programs through the Department of Social Services. Twenty-four youth were over the age of 18 and were out of contact, had run-away, were living with friends, or were in other unstable housing situations. One youth was placed through the Development Disabilities Administration and four 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 2025 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 21.6 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 eight-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. On average, children assigned earlier, had two or fewer placements vs. four placements when assigned at review.

IV. CASA in the Coming Year

As we start a new year, the statewide network of programs has been working closely with the Judiciary and a consultant to develop a unified path forward. Several meetings with the programs, the JFS staff, and Maryland CASA Association board representatives have occurred and a facilitated meeting of all three entities together is planned for early in 2026.

It is the hope of all involved, that an effective statewide association can be formed that provides the support the programs need to meet their shared goal of effectively serving the foster children of Maryland.

In the meantime, JFS will be hosting CASA Days of Training at the Judicial Center in March to provide training to both staff and volunteers. JFS also provides technical assistance and training to the programs using the CASA "Optima" database and has been coordinating with the National CASA quality assurance team to develop a program review protocol that will be implemented in the new year. We anticipate four new program directors in 2026, and JFS staff will assist the programs with onboarding the new directors.

During this time of transition and redevelopment, JFS will continue to provide training and technical assistance to support the programs' efforts. The Judiciary's continued support will help to make programs stronger and more able to provide information which aids the courts in making 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 initiatives to (1) promote accountability and public trust, (2) improve access to justice, and (3) encourage a service-oriented approach to court operations. The Maryland Judiciary continues to be a critically important source of funding for CASA programs across Maryland.