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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**STATE LEADERS APPOINT CASA ADVOCATES TO THE OFFICE OF THE CHILD  
ADVOCATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**



Atlanta, GA, December 18, 2023 – The Georgia Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) expands its Advisory Committee to include a new seat, one designated for a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) representative. Selected by the Speaker of the House, Jon G. Burns, the inaugural seat has been appointed to Lainie Jenkins, long-time CASA advocate, program director, and board member. Jenkins most recently served with TLC CASA based in Dublin, Georgia.

“Lainie has been a wonderful advocate for the wellbeing of Georgia’s children for many years,” said Burns. “She brings a wealth of first-hand experience to the OCA Advisory Committee. Her involvement with the CASA organization includes fourteen years of experience and spans twenty-five counties. She is the perfect fit to establish this new seat on the committee.”

OCA provides independent oversight of persons, organizations, and agencies responsible for providing services to or caring for children who are victims of child abuse and neglect or whose domestic situation requires intervention by the state. Historically, the Advisory Committee consisted of seven members. The addition of this CASA seat is part of an expansion that brings the committee to ten, an update the OCA Director, Jerry Bruce, J.D., is pleased with.

“Adding a CASA-specific seat to OCA’s Advisory Committee will enhance the perspectives provided to our office,” said Bruce. “Child welfare in Georgia has a lot of moving parts and requires cooperation among many agencies and organizations. The expansion of our Advisory Committee to include a current or former foster parent, a former foster child, and a CASA representative helps bring to our work a wealth of experience that goes beyond the courtroom. This expansion will continue to empower us to review and assess patterns of treatment and service for children, to identify policy implications, and to advocate for necessary systemic improvements.”

Earlier this year, Georgia CASA executive director, Jennifer King, was appointed as the non-profit children’s agency representative. In May 2018, she was selected to succeed Georgia CASA’s longest-serving Executive Director as the fifth director in the organization’s 30-year history. With degrees in Nonprofit Administration and Child Development, King has dedicated her career to making connections with and on behalf of children and families, alongside advocates and nonprofit leaders, and the larger community.



Current members of the OCA Advisory Committee include the following appointments:

- Governor Appointments - Jennifer King of Georgia CASA as the non-profit children's agency representative, Andre Blanchard as the social worker representative, and Jay Watkins as the former foster parent representative.
- Lt. Governor Appointments – Nikki Raymond of GA Hope as the for-profit children's agency representative, Dr. Carla Santiago as the psychologist representative, and Morgan Mayo as the former foster child representative.
- Speaker of the House Appointments - Lainie Jenkins as the CASA representative and Dr, Michelle Zeanah as the pediatrician representative and Donald Sheppard as the attorney representative.
- Chief Justice of Supreme Court Appointment – Hon. Render Heard of the Tifton Judicial Circuit.

About Georgia CASA: Forty-six affiliate CASA programs have been established throughout the state since Georgia CASA was founded 35 years ago. This year brought Georgia CASA's final geographic expansion to reach children in foster care in all 159 counties throughout the state. Each affiliate CASA program engages the community to train volunteer advocates. Volunteers are everyday citizens who offer individualized attention and best-interest advocacy for children in foster care. The CASA organization is the only model of this kind, built around one child and one compassionate, highly trained adult advocate. The vision of Georgia CASA is for all children who experience abuse or neglect to have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential with the support of permanent connections to family.

For more information about Georgia CASA or to find an affiliate CASA program near you, visit <https://www.gacasa.org/>.

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