



MINNESOTA CHAPTER

February 5, 2023

Representative Jamie Becker-Finn and Chair,
Minnesota House of Representatives Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee
559 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and members of the Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee:

The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts – Minnesota Chapter is an interdisciplinary association of professionals dedicated to the resolution of family conflict. Members include many of the leading practitioners, mental health providers, attorneys, financial experts, and judicial officers in the family court arena.

AFCC-MN urges your support of the Guardian ad Litem FY 2024/25 budget request. Guardians ad Litem are appointed by the court when a child has been abused or neglected, and work independently to help ensure children have their primary needs met and the court has the information to rule confidently.

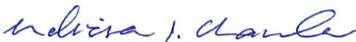
Minnesotans benefit tremendously from the statewide independent Guardian ad Litem program, which advocates for the best interests of children, minor parents, and incompetent adults in juvenile and family court cases. Guardians ad Litem play a critical role in many cases, as they help educate the parties, the attorneys, and the Courts through their advocacy on behalf of minor children. Without Guardians ad Litem, it can be difficult for the child's best interests to be placed at the forefront of the matter.

The additional requested funding, also included in the Governor's proposed budget, would assist the Guardian ad Litem program to hire and retain skilled, diverse, and knowledgeable employees. It is critical to the welfare of Minnesota's children and communities to attract a diverse pool of professionals who are qualified to serve in this imperative role to ensure vigorous and effective advocacy. Because there is no single population of children who find themselves in these cases, ensuring a diverse workforce of Guardians ad Litem is an important issue for all Minnesotans.

As an organization comprised of individuals who provide all aspects of services in family law matters, and view these matters through many different lenses, we simply cannot overstate the importance of Guardians as Litem. The present burden on the Guardian ad Litem program is such that in many counties it is virtually impossible to have a Guardian ad Litem appointed unless there is domestic violence involved. While certainly not a long term solution to this issue, the increased funding currently before this Committee is a measured and reasonable step in the right direction to improve a problem that impacts countless families across Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Melissa Chawla, JD
President, AFCC-MN


Carlo Faccini, JD
Legislative & Policy Committee Co-Chair, AFCC-MN