



MINNESOTA GUARDIAN AD LITEM  
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR  
TAMI BAKER-OLSON

# OVERVIEW AND BUDGET REQUEST PRESENTATION

House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

The Minnesota Guardian ad Litem Program is committed to giving children a strong voice in our court system. The Program provides advocates who represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in court and are independent from the court and the child welfare system.

**The GAL Program helps ensure children receive appropriate services, and that their physical, mental, educational, and cultural needs are met.**

## **1974 - U.S. Congress Enacts Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)**

To receive federal foster care funds, a state must enact and enforce laws mandating the appointment of a guardian ad litem on every juvenile court case alleging that a child has been abused or neglected.

## **1975 - MN Legislature Enacts Guardian ad Litem statutes**

Mandates appointment of a GAL on every juvenile and family court case alleging a child is abused or neglected (M.S. 260C.163; M.S. 518.165)

## **State Guardian ad Litem Board**

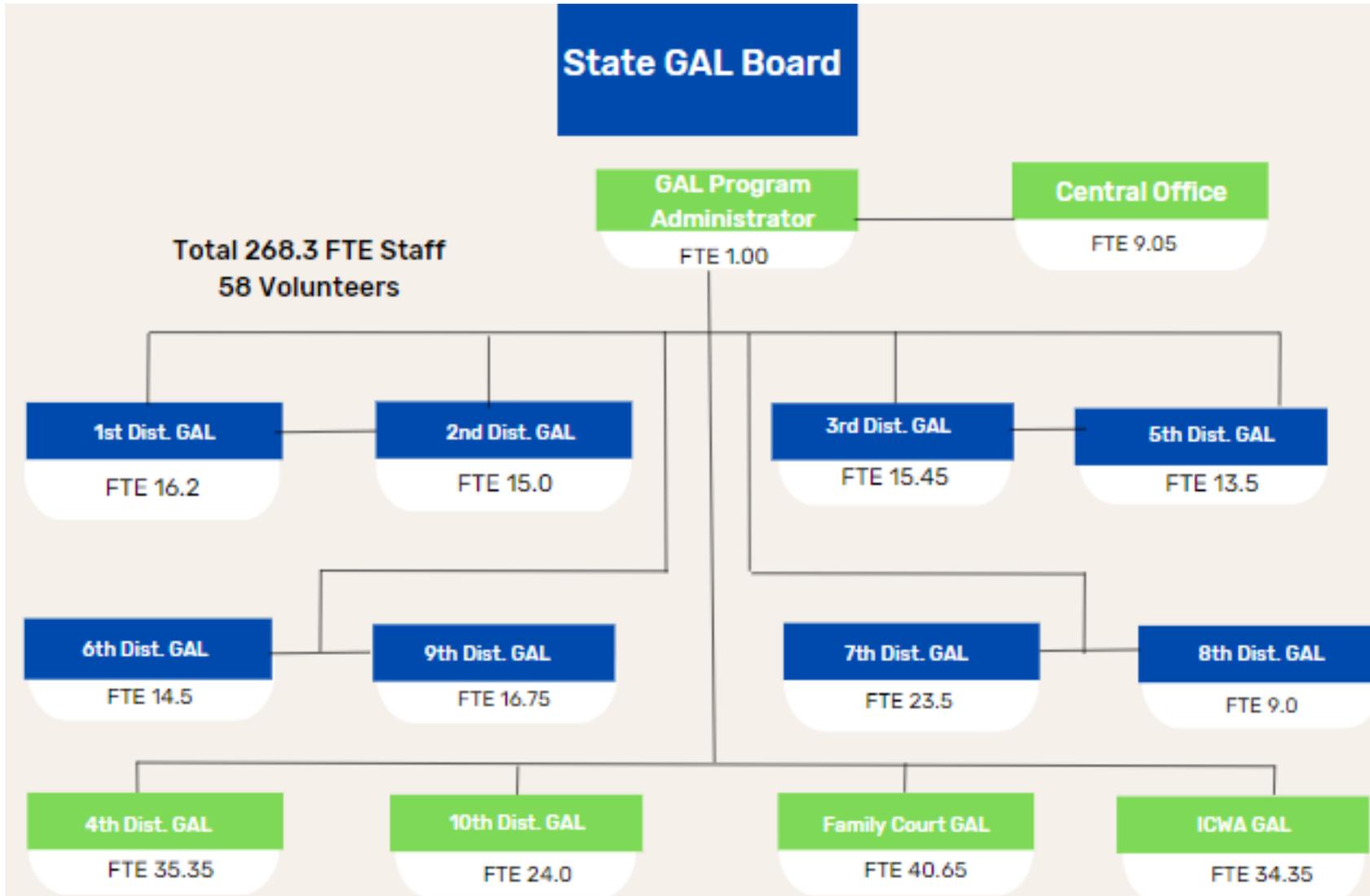
In Minnesota, Guardian ad Litem are employed and overseen by an independent State Guardian ad Litem Board, in the Judicial Branch.

- Appointed by the court/judge when a child has been abused or neglected.
- Work independently to help ensure children have their primary needs met and that the court has information to rule confidently.
- Advocate for a child whose welfare is a matter of concern for the court. In legal terms, it means "guardian of the lawsuit."
- Independent voice representing the child's best interest when appointed in a juvenile or family court proceeding.



- Active in all 87 counties
- 268 employees and 56 volunteers
- Advocated for the best interests of over 13,155 children in 2022 in both Child Protection and Family Court proceedings
- Includes nearly 1,300 Native American children on ICWA cases
- Attended over 30,000 court proceedings
- Filed over 14,000 court reports

# Full-Time Equivalent Positions by District



# Race equity and inclusion strategic planning



We support trained, effective Guardians ad Litem to advocate for safe and permanent homes for the children we represent. Together, we will build and sustain an effective, racially equitable program that advocates for children and their families with compassion, high engagement, and a community lens.

The Guardian ad Litem Board is focused on impacting disparities and has a dedicated, independent Indian Child Welfare (ICWA) Division.

- Created in 2020
- Developed in response to the alarming removal rates of American Indian children in the MN child welfare system.
- Ensure statewide ICWA/MIFPA compliance through a culturally informed lens, and strengths-based practice towards family re-unification, family preservation and family healing.
- Critical in their unique advocacy for the Best Interest of an Indian Child under the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act to preserve and maintain an Indian child's family.
- The ICWA Division is regionalized and specialized statewide. ICWA Coordinators and ICWA GALs are placed strategically to build capacity to assign an ICWA GAL to all ICWA cases. We are close to 90% of our goal of 100% of ICWA GAL coverage of all statewide ICWA cases. We currently have 31 ICWA Division staff and are hiring for 5 more positions.

**BOARD PRIORITY:** hire and retain skilled, diverse, knowledgeable employees.

**WHY:** 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.

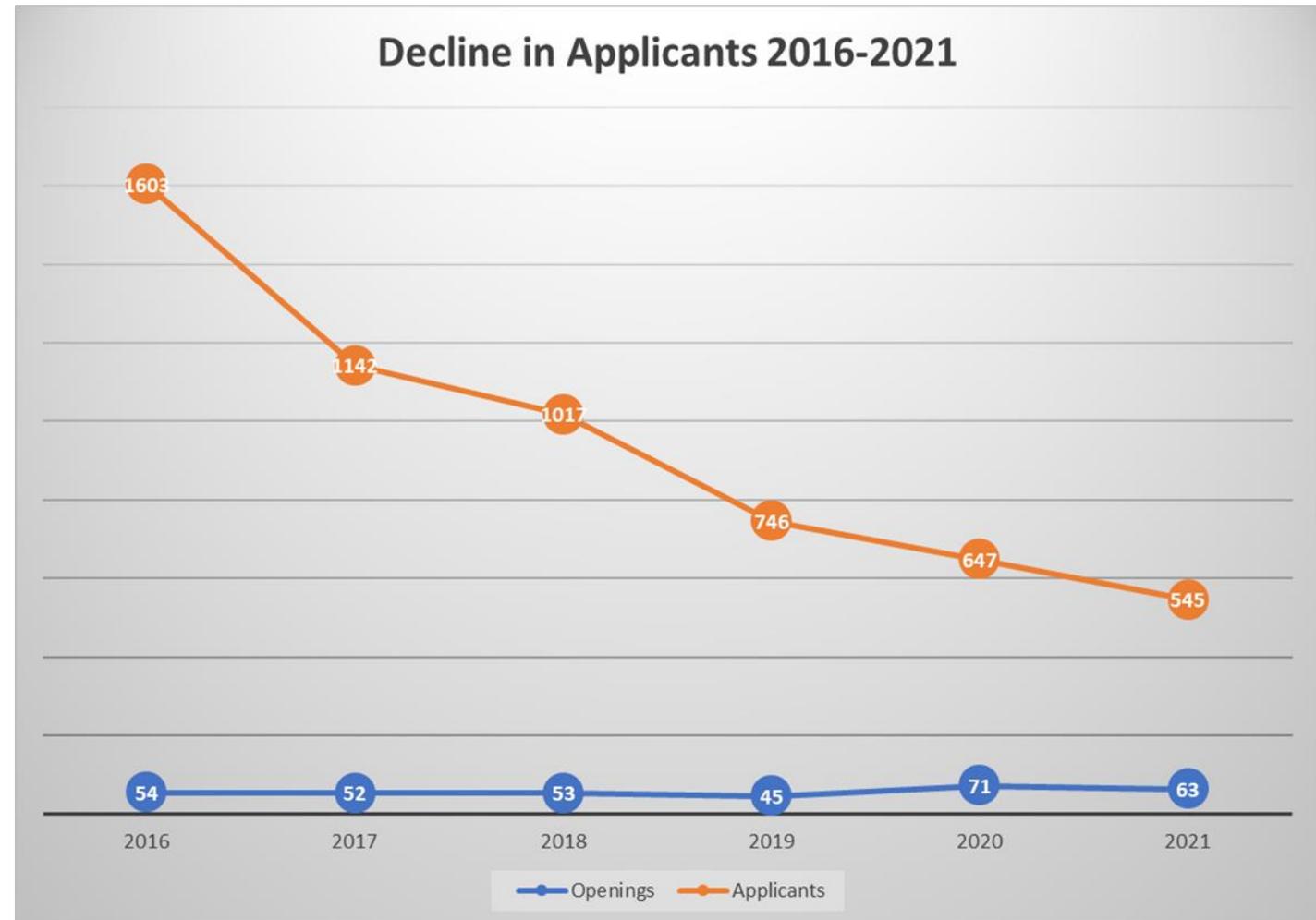
**CHALLENGE:** Current wages are not competitive to attract and retain staff.

In 2022, the GAL Program commissioned an employee class and compensation study, which revealed an **inequity in pay for Guardians ad Litem when compared to their child welfare counterparts.** The issue of pay equity is impacting recruitment and retention of qualified and diverse hiring pools.



## Vacancies and departures have increased.

While GAL job postings have been relatively consistent since 2016, the number of applicants has dramatically decreased.



FY2024/25 General Fund Budget Starting Base Budget: \$45,630,000

**Minnesota Guardian Ad Litem Board**  
**FY2024/25 Maintain Core Guardian Ad Litem Board Operations Change Request**

9.0%/6.0% Employee Compensation Increase	FY2024		FY2025		FY2024/25	
Employee Compensation	\$	1,365,000	\$	2,357,000	\$	3,722,000
Employee Insurance <sup>1</sup>		178,000	\$	448,000		626,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>1,543,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>2,805,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>4,348,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> Insurance costs: 2.14% (FY23)/5.84% (FY24)/5.85% (FY25)

Questions?

Thank you!