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| FIFTH CIRCUIT CASA VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK |
| Policies and Guidelines |
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| **Approved by the Board of Directors: 00/00/2024** |

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| The Fifth Circuit CASA Program relies on its body of trained volunteers to provide high-quality advocacy services for the abused and neglected children in the service area. Volunteers with the Fifth Circuit CASA Program must read the policies and sign the forms included in the handbook, indicating that they have read and accept the policies of the program. A copy of the signed forms will be kept in the volunteer’s file. Volunteers are to keep their copy of the Volunteer Handbook for their reference. |



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**Please Note:**

**The Executive Director of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program has responsibility for administering written personnel policies, which were approved by the Board of Directors. To interpret policies and respond to situations not covered by written policies, the Executive Director may consult with the Chairperson of the Board of Directors and inform the Board of issues, which may indicate the need for policy revisions. Upon recommendation by the Board Chairperson, the Board may approve changes in the Program’s policies by a majority vote of the members of the Board. CASA staff will ensure that all volunteers are informed about all policy updates.**

**Each volunteer is expected to be familiar with these policies. If the volunteer has questions regarding these policies, they should consult with CASA staff.**

**Only the Board of Directors can authorize exceptions to the Program’s policies.**

**MISSION**

The mission of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program is to promote and protect the best interests of abused and neglected children involved in court proceedings through the advocacy efforts of trained volunteers.

**OVERVIEW**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program Volunteer Handbook (the “Handbook”) has been developed to provide general guidelines about the Fifth Circuit CASA Program (the “Program”) policies and procedures for volunteers. It is a guide to assist you in becoming familiar with some of the privileges and obligations of your service.

None of the policies or guidelines in the Handbook are intended to give rise to contractual rights or obligations, or to be construed as a guarantee of volunteer status for any specific period, or any specific type of work.

Additionally, these guidelines are subject to modification, amendment, or revocation by the Board of Directors of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program at any time, without advance notice.

The volunteer policies of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program are established by the Board of Directors, which has delegated authority and responsibility for their administration to the Executive Director. The Executive Director may, in turn, delegate authority for administering specific policies to CASA staff.

Volunteers are encouraged to consult the CASA case management system for additional information regarding the policies, procedures, and privileges described in this Handbook**.**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program will provide everyone with a copy of this Handbook upon becoming an official CASA volunteer. All volunteers are expected to abide by it.

The highest standards of personal and professional ethics and behavior are expected of all Fifth Circuit CASA Program volunteers. Further, the Fifth Circuit CASA Program expects each volunteer to practice good judgment, diplomacy, and courtesy in their professional relationships with clients, professionals involved in the case, the Fifth Circuit CASA Program Board of Directors, staff, and the public.

**VOLUNTEER ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

A CASA Volunteer’s role and responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

* Reports any incident of child abuse or neglect, or any situation in which the volunteer has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger to the appropriate authorities and the program supervisor.
* Obtains first-hand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by conducting an ongoing review of all relevant documents and records and interviewing the child, parents, social workers, teachers and other relevant persons to gather information about the child’s situation.
* Identifies and advocates for the best interests of the child.
* Collaborates and coordinates with legal, child welfare, and other partners to ensure service provision is in the child’s best interests.
* At every hearing where permitted, provides a report for the court which includes information and recommendations about the child’s needs and best interests.
* Appears in court to advocate for the child’s best interests and provide testimony when necessary.
* Meets in-person with the child once every 30 days at a minimum.
* In-person contact should take place where the child lives for most visits to ensure in-depth knowledge of the child’s environment for informed recommendations to the court.
* To allow for an exception, the program must have a written exceptions policy outlining circumstances when exceptions may be permitted. Exceptions to permit less frequent in-person contact, or alternatives for in-person contact, shall be documented and retained in the program’s case record as to the justification for and reasonableness of the exception.
* Makes recommendations for services for the child and the child’s family.
* Seeks information about whether a permanency plan has been created for the child and makes recommendations concerning permanency.
* Monitors implementation of service plans and court orders and assesses whether court-ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and whether review hearings should be scheduled with the court.
* Inform the court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means as determined by court rules or statute.
* Advocates for the child’s best interests in the community by interfacing with mental health, educational and other relevant systems, subject to confidentiality limitations.
* Participates in all scheduled case reviews with program supervisory staff.
* Participates in continuing education relevant to CASA/GAL service.
* Maintains complete records about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child and the child’s life circumstances.
* Discusses all recommendations concerning the case with the program supervisor prior to submitting recommendations to the court.
* Is prohibited from the following activities:
	+ Taking a child to the volunteer’s home.
* Taking a child to any location that is not pre-approved by the child’s legal guardian, custodial agency and CASA/GAL program supervisor or director.
* Photographs of the child without the State Child Welfare Agency and CASA program permission.

**VOLUNTEER SELECTION POLICY**

 A CASA volunteer is an individual who respects a child’s inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe environment that meets that child’s best interests. A CASA volunteer advocates for the child’s best interests in the court at every stage of the case once appointed by the court. Volunteer applicants with the Fifth Circuit CASA Program must be at least 21 years of age and complete the program’s written application, provide at least three (3) references, and participate in an interview with CASA staff. CASA volunteers transferring from another CASA program must apply to the Fifth Circuit CASA Program and complete the required interview, screening, potential training or program orientation, and swearing-in. The CASA volunteer screening process will include verification of the applicant’s social security number. Falsifying information during the volunteer screening process will result in the applicant’s dismissal from the program.

All background screenings must be completed before the volunteer can take the required volunteer training course, and verification is on file with the Fifth Circuit CASA Program.

Volunteer applicants must successfully complete the 30-hour training course presented by the Fifth Circuit CASA Program. Documentation of training will be done by CASA staff using the *CASA Management* program.

Individuals who successfully complete all the above requirements shall be sworn in by the judge as official CASA volunteers. They are then eligible for court-appointment to a specific case to advocate for children who have come into the court system because of abuse and neglect.

**PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEER BACKGROUND CHECKS**

All approved volunteers must have a background check acceptable to the Fifth Circuit CASA Program completed before beginning any child advocacy training for the Fifth Circuit CASA Program. Documentation of the background checks will be completed by CASA staff in the *CASA Manager* program and in the individual’s volunteer personnel file.

Volunteer applicants must authorize the Fifth Circuit CASA Program and other appropriate agencies to secure a state, local, and national criminal records check, child protective services central registry check in the states of residency during the previous five (5) years, and sex offender registry as permissible by law. Background check to include social security number verification.

If an applicant refuses to sign a release of information form, the Fifth Circuit CASA Program will reject the application.

Any applicant found to have been convicted of or having charges pending for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect or related acts that would pose risks to children or the Fifth Circuit CASA Program’s credibility is not accepted as a volunteer with the program.

If an applicant is found to have committed a misdemeanor or felony that is unrelated to or would not pose a risk to children and would not negatively impact the credibility of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program, the program will consider the extent of the rehabilitation since the misdemeanor or felony was committed as well as other factors that may influence the decision to accept the applicant as a CASA volunteer.

Any concerns regarding the results of an applicant’s background check will be reviewed by the Executive Director and the Chairperson of the Board of Directors for approval or denial of volunteer service with the Fifth Circuit CASA Program.

**VOLUNTEER TRAINING & CONTINUING EDUCATION**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program delivers training to volunteers based upon the National CASA Volunteer Training Curriculum. The purpose of the training is to increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of volunteers so that they can fulfill the responsibilities of a CASA volunteer.

The training will consist of at least 30 hours of required pre-service training, and twelve (12) hours of required in-service training per year. Guest speakers may deliver specific portions of the training under the supervision of Fifth Circuit CASA Program staff. The CASA case management system will ensure documentation of each volunteer’s training and continuing education hours in the CASA management program and in the volunteer’s personnel file. The CASA management program will provide on-going training and coaching for the volunteers as they work through their CASA cases. There are no exceptions for not taking the pre-service and continuing education trainings.

 **Pre-service** training will include educational presentations on the following topics:

* Roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer.
* The court process of a child welfare case.
* Dynamics of families including mental health substance abuse, domestic violence, and poverty.
* Relevant state laws, regulations and policies.
* Relevant federal laws, regulations and policies, including the Adoption and Safe Families Act (AFSA), the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), and the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA).
* Confidentiality and secure record keeping practices.
* Mandatory reporting of abuse and neglect.
* Child development and special needs.
* Child abuse and neglect.
* Permanency planning.
* Community agencies and resources are available to meet the needs of children and families.
* Communication and information gathering.
* Effective advocacy to ensure client services are provided appropriately.
* Cultural competency.
* Volunteer and client safety.

**Continuing education** requirements are 12 hours per year, reported to CASA staff. The CASA program will support and offer training to assist in meeting this requirement. Volunteers taking a break from service for over 12 months will need to meet with CASA program staff for refresher training and meet the annual 12 hours of continuing education.

**CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY - VOLUNTEERS**

Volunteers with the Fifth Circuit CASA Program will ensure confidentiality and privacy regarding history, records, and discussions about the people we serve. The very fact that an individual is served by the Fifth Circuit CASA Program must be kept confidential; disclosure can be made only under specific conditions, which are described below, for reasons relating to law enforcement and fulfillment of our mission. Any written, oral, or electronic communication between a client and a CASA Volunteer must be kept confidential. All records identifying a client and any information relating to the services provided to that client are to be kept confidential. CASA volunteers shall not disclose any information about a person, including the fact that the person is or is not served by our organization, to anyone outside of this organization unless authorized by CASA staff, the Executive Director, or the Board Chairperson. The principle of confidentiality must be maintained in functions and activities, and the breach of confidentiality may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of CASA volunteer status.

 Clients who feel their information has been shared inappropriately may file a grievance.

 Grievance procedures can be obtained from the Executive Director.

 Volunteers are required to sign a Pledge of Confidentiality as a condition of service.

 Any volunteer who discloses confidential Fifth Circuit CASA Program information will be

 subject to disciplinary action, including possible separation from CASA volunteer status.

 CASA staff will make a copy of the signed Pledge of Confidentiality for the

 volunteer, and place the original copy in the volunteer’s personnel file.

 Confidential practices include, but are not limited to:

1. Case scenarios that do not lend themselves to easy identification of the particular client involved may be used for purposes of communicating our mission. In such instances, names should always be changed, and other personally identifying factors such as race, age, date of birth, and religious affiliation of clients must not be shared.
2. Volunteers may discuss, in confidential settings, details of their assigned case with the Program staff. Discussion with other professionals who have access to the same information, i.e.: attorneys, judges, social workers, counselors, and others assigned to the case and having access to the case, is allowed only as specified on the volunteer’s Order of Appointment. Any other discussion of case details must be approved by CASA staff.
3. Confidential information will not be given out over the telephone. Confidential messages will not be left on voice mail or through other electronic communication.
4. If a client makes a statement of harm to themselves or others, the volunteer will inform the foster parent, Family Services Specialist (FSS), and CASA Case Manager. In such instances, the volunteer must not leave the client unless the client is being supervised by the foster parent or FSS worker.
5. All electronic and hard copies of case correspondence, case notes and case records are to be safely secured by the CASA office through the web-based, password protected case management system and in locked, fireproof file cabinets.
6. All electronic and hard copy case documents, including the volunteer’s notes, must be turned in to CASA staff after the final disposition of the case. The documents will be added to the Program’s case file and will be kept for at least seven (7) years.
7. CASA staff is responsible for the destruction of the confidential records of clients after the time limit for holding such records has expired. All identifying details in hard copy records will be redacted out and the pages will be shredded by an authorized individual who has signed a Pledge of Confidentiality. All identifying details in electronic records will be erased and the files permanently deleted.

**ORIENTATION POLICY**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program strives to provide a highly trained volunteer for each qualifying case. Because of the nature of abuse and neglect situations, there may be a period between the date that a volunteer is eligible to take a case and the date when a case is offered to a volunteer. CASA staff will implement an orientation process to review the Program’s policies and procedures with each volunteer when they receive their Order of Appointment to a case. Documentation of the orientation session will be made by CASA staff in the *CASA Management* program and in the volunteer’s personnel file.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program expects the primary interest of CASA volunteers to be the individuals we serve. A conflict of interest occurs when the interests of a volunteer or another outside party actually or potentially affect the program or a case in a negative way.

The CASA volunteer may not be related to any parties involved in the case or be employed in a position or participating in a program that might result in a conflict of interest. The CASA volunteer will immediately tell CASA staff about any potential conflict of interest with a case, and CASA staff will determine whether the CASA volunteer may be appointed to the case.

Failure to disclose a potential conflict of interest to CASA staff may result in the discontinuation of the individual’s eligibility to continue as a CASA volunteer with the program.

Volunteers are not to accept gifts, gratuities, personal property or other items of value from an outside person or organization as an incentive to provide services.

**TRANSPORTATION POLICY**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program does not allow its volunteers to transport the Program’s clients (children and parents) in the volunteers’ personal vehicles. The Program does not allow the CASA volunteer to take a child to the volunteer’s home. The Fifth Circuit CASA Program requires each volunteer to a wear seat belt, not use a cell phone, and to follow all traffic laws when they are driving while conducting Program volunteer work.

The Transportation Policy is in place for the safety and protection of both the client and the volunteer, as well as that of the Program. Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action, including the possible termination of the volunteer’s service with the Program.

**POLICY AGAINST WORKPLACE HARASSMENT**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program is committed to providing a work environment for all volunteers that is free from sexual harassment and other types of discriminatory harassment. Volunteers are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to show respect for the Program staff, other CASA volunteers, and clients and others involved in the CASA cases. To reinforce this commitment, the Fifth Circuit CASA Program has a policy against harassment and a reporting procedure for volunteers who have been subjected to or witnessed harassment. This policy applies to all work-related settings and activities, whether inside or outside the workplace, and includes business-related social events. The Fifth Circuit CASA Program’s property may not be used to engage in conduct that violates this policy.

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program’s policy against sexual harassment prohibits sexual advances or requests for sexual favors or other physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature, when: (1) submission to such conduct is made an express or implicit condition of volunteer service; (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for volunteer status decisions affecting the individual who submits to or rejects such conduct; or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a volunteer’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliation, or offensive working environment.

It is against the Fifth Circuit CASA Program’s policy to engage in verbal or physical conduct that degrades or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of their race, color, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, national origin, disability, or other protected category that (1) has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, or offensive working environment; (2) has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance; or (3) otherwise adversely affects an individual’s work opportunities.

 It is also against the Fifth Circuit CASA Program’s policy to retaliate against a volunteer for filing a complaint of sexual or discriminatory harassment or for cooperating with an investigation of a complaint of sexual or discriminatory harassment.

**Reporting of Harassment**. If you believe that you have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment or other discriminatory harassment by any associate of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program, you should report the incident immediately to the Executive Director or to the Chairperson of the Board of Directors. Possible harassment by others with whom the Fifth Circuit CASA Program has a business relationship, including customers and vendors, should also be reported as soon as possible so that appropriate action can be taken.

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program will promptly and thoroughly investigate all reports of harassment as discreetly and confidentially as practicable. The investigation would generally include a private interview with the person making a report of harassment. It would also generally be necessary to discuss allegations of harassment with the accused individual and others who may have information relevant to the investigation. The Fifth Circuit CASA Program’s goal is to conduct a thorough investigation, to determine whether harassment occurred, and to determine what action to take if it is determined that improper behavior occurred.

If the Fifth Circuit CASA Program determines that a violation of this policy has occurred, it will take appropriate disciplinary action against the offending party, which can include counseling, warning, suspension, and termination. Volunteers who report violations of this policy and volunteers who cooperate with investigations into alleged violations of this policy will not be subject to retaliation. Upon completion of the investigation, the Fifth Circuit CASA Program will inform the volunteer who made the complaint of the results of the investigation.

Compliance with this policy is a condition of each volunteer’s status. Volunteers are encouraged to raise any questions or concerns about this policy or about possible discriminatory harassment with the Executive Director. In the case where the allegation of harassment is against the Executive Director, volunteers must notify the Chairperson of the Board of Directors.

**SOLICITATION**

Volunteers are prohibited from soliciting (personally or via electronic mail) for membership, pledges, subscriptions, the collection of money, or for any other unauthorized purpose anywhere on Fifth Circuit CASA Program property, especially those of a partisan or political nature.

Volunteers are prohibited from distributing, circulating, or posting literature, petitions, or other materials at any time for any purpose without the prior approval of the Executive Director or their designee.

**JOB DESCRIPTION**

The CASA volunteer position shall have a written job description. Job descriptions define the volunteer’s general duties and responsibilities. CASA staff will provide each volunteer with a written job description, and document in the volunteer’s personnel file the date which this occurred. The Volunteer Job Description shall be reviewed when substantial changes in volunteer responsibilities occur and will be updated by CASA staff as needed.

**LEGAL ADVICE, COUNSELING, PLACEMENT, GIFTS**

The CASA volunteer may not give legal advice or therapeutic counseling to anyone involved in their CASA case. The CASA volunteer may not make placement arrangements for the child/children in their CASA case. The CASA volunteer may not give money to the child, the child’s family, or the foster parent in their CASA case.

**PERSONAL APPEARANCE GUIDELINES**

Volunteers must present a professional image when representing the Program by wearing appropriate business attire and maintaining good grooming habits. Volunteers should exercise good judgment in their choice of work clothing. Casual dress attire is acceptable when the volunteer is not attending court hearings. Volunteers attending court hearings are expected to dress professionally. If a volunteer’s attire is deemed inappropriate, they may be asked to change.

**MANDATORY REPORTER POLICY**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program staff and volunteers are required to report any incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, elder or vulnerable adult to local authorities for further investigation.

* Under the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) amended in 2010, all 50 states have passed laws mandating the reporting of child abuse and neglect.
* Volunteer training will include identifying a minimum set of acts or behaviors that characterize physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse.
* As a mandatory reporter, the CASA volunteer is to report any incident of abuse or neglect of a child, elder or vulnerable adult, or any situation in which the CASA volunteer has reason to believe that such an individual is in imminent danger, to CASA staff and to the local law enforcement or social services office.

**SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENT POLICY**

Public Law 103227, the Pro Children Act of 1994, prohibits smoking in any portion of any indoor facility owned, leased or contracted for by an entity and used routinely or regularly to provide health, day care, education, or library services to children under the age of 18, if the services are funded by the Federal programs either directly or through State and Local governments, by Federal grant, contract, loan, or loan guarantee. Therefore, the Fifth Circuit CASA Program provides a smoke-free environment for its employees, volunteers, and clients. Smoking and smokeless tobacco are prohibited in the Program office and while performing Program duties.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program office is in an accessible location, free of barriers which restrict employment of or use by physically challenged employees, volunteers, and clients. CASA staff will ensure that all reasonable accommodations are provided for an employee, volunteer, or client.

**ALCOHOL AND DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE POLICY**

This policy establishes guidelines for maintaining an Alcohol and Drug-Free Workplace as delineated by the Federal Drug-Free Workplace Act.

All Fifth Circuit CASA Program employees and volunteers are prohibited from unlawfully manufacturing, distributing, dispensing, possessing, or using controlled substances. Any staff member or Program volunteer violating this policy is subject to discipline, and possible termination for a first offense. Controlled substances include, but are not limited to:

1. Narcotics (heroin, morphine, etc.)
2. Cannabis (marijuana, hashish)
3. Stimulants (cocaine, diet pills, etc.)
4. Depressants (tranquilizers)
5. Hallucinogens (PCP, LSD, “designer drugs,” etc.)

Any volunteer convicted of violating a criminal drug statute must inform the Fifth Circuit CASA Program of such conviction (including pleas of guilty or nolo contendere) within five days of the conviction occurring. Failure to inform the Fifth Circuit CASA Program subjects the volunteer to disciplinary action and possible termination of volunteer status for the first offense.

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program reserves the right to encourage volunteers who violate this policy to participate in an approved rehabilitation of alcohol or drug abuse assistance program as an alternative to removal of his or her volunteer status. Satisfactory completion may be a condition for continued volunteer status with the Program. This will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

**WORKPLACE NON-VIOLENCE POLICY**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program prohibits any behavior that could be construed as threatening, aggressive, confrontational, or violent. Absolutely no weapons will be allowed on Program premises. The Fifth Circuit CASA Program reserves the right to require any volunteer, upon request, to submit to a search of personal effects. Volunteers should immediately warn CASA staff of any potentially dangerous or suspicious workplace activity, situations, or incidents that they either observe or are aware of that involve other employees, volunteers, visitors, or outsiders who appear threatening. Any volunteer who violates this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, with possible termination of volunteer status. Violations of this policy by employees, visitors, volunteers, or outsiders may be reported to local law enforcement. Volunteers will not be retaliated against for making good faith reports under this policy.

**GOVERNMENTAL AND POLITICAL AFFAIRS POLICY**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program encourages its volunteers to take an active interest in government and to participate in political affairs. All volunteers have the right to express their opinions on political issues and candidates and are also encouraged to exercise these rights. However, such volunteer activity is subject to these conditions:

* Non-partisan position of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program —No action will be allowed by any person that infringes upon the right of any employee or volunteer to decide which candidates or positions to support. The Fifth Circuit CASA Program will not endorse or contribute to any political candidate, party, or cause.
* Individual actions—No volunteer is allowed to give the impression that any political action or position represents the Fifth Circuit CASA Program. All political activities are to be done as the actions of individuals, on their own time, away from nonprofit facilities.
* No volunteer is allowed directly or indirectly to coerce, attempt to coerce, command, or advise any Program staff member or affiliate to pay, lend or contribute anything of value to a party, committee, organization, program, or person for political purpose.
* Volunteers who wish to seek elective office will inform the Executive Director.
* Any questions related to this policy must be referred to the Executive Director.

**CRISIS PLAN**

In the event of a crisis, The Executive Director will determine the immediate plan of response. The Executive Director will meet with the Board Chairperson at the earliest opportunity unless a conflict of interest exists between the Executive Director and the crisis issue. The Board Chairperson will set a further plan of response, also to be done at the earliest opportunity. The Executive Director or the Board Chairperson will inform all employees of the program’s plan of response within six hours. All contact with media outlets regarding the Fifth Circuit CASA Program’s position on the matter must be made by the Executive Director or the Board Chairperson. In addressing issues that may have significant impact on the credibility of the program or reputation for funding at the state or national level, the Executive Director or the Board Chairperson will share information with the contact person for CASA programs in South Dakota, and with the Regional Program Officer of the National CASA Association within 24 hours. Confidentiality limitations will be followed in the release of any information to the public.

**PROGRAM REPRESENTATION**

A volunteer may not speak to the news media or make a public appearance or public speech as an official or unofficial spokesperson of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program without prior clearance from the Executive Director. All inquiries from the media must be referred to the Executive Director.

**ABSENCE POLICY**

Good communication between the Fifth Circuit CASA Program and its volunteers is essential to the provision of high-quality child advocacy services. Volunteers do not have regular hours in which they must complete their CASA case responsibilities. Therefore, volunteers do not have to notify CASA staff when they are absent due to illness or other personal reasons. However, if the volunteer has an active CASA case and will be out of town for more than a week, they must notify CASA staff. The volunteer must also let CASA staff know if they will not be able to attend any of the scheduled hearings for their CASA case.

Personal reasons for excused absences may be vacation, jury duty, work-related travel, military duty, and medical or family issues. Volunteers should notify CASA staff as far ahead as possible when they know they will be unavailable for more than a week.

The inability of CASA staff to maintain contact with a volunteer during an active CASA case may result in CASA staff requesting a Rescind Order for the volunteer’s assignment to the case.

A volunteer who has not been assigned to a case for a year and has not completed the hours of in-service requirements for the year will either need to re-take the pre-service volunteer training or a refresher training as determined by CASA staff before they may be assigned to a new CASA case.

**SEPARATION FROM THE PROGRAM**

A CASA volunteer may be asked to resign from the Fifth Circuit CASA Program’s child advocacy program if CASA staff determines that the CASA volunteer is not demonstrating an ability to provide adequate advocacy for the child/children in their assigned CASA case, or for failing to carry out their assigned duties. The CASA volunteer will also be separated from the Fifth Circuit CASA Program for acting without court or program approval that endangers the child/children in their CASA case, or which is outside the powers of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program, and for engaging in ex-parte communications with the court.

**LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP) POLICY**

No child (client) will be denied services based on Limited English Proficiency. The Fifth Circuit CASA Program will take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with LEP have meaningful access and an equal opportunity to participate in the child advocacy services provided by Fifth Circuit CASA Program. An LEP client will be identified based on interactions with Program volunteers. LEP includes not only verbal but written English proficiency. If a child speaks English but does not read English and written materials are not available in the language they read proficiently in, then all written materials will be read to the client. If the client does not speak English proficiently then the language of choice will be identified using “I speak” cards. Once the language is identified the Fifth Circuit CASA Program will take the following steps to assist the client:

* The Fifth Circuit CASA Program will advocate on the child’s behalf to ensure their LEP needs are met.
* Contact a program staff, board member, or program volunteer who speaks the language.
* Use a translator service.
* Language services for LEP clients are provided free of charge by the SD-DSS.

Neither Fifth Circuit CASA nor the Dept. of Social Services will charge the child’s family for any LEP services, and family members will not be used as translators for sensitive materials. The Fifth Circuit CASA Program will continue to reevaluate the services available to LEP clients and seek ways to assist them with receiving those services. Staff may contact the Yankton Literacy Council for training on LEP.

Locate LEP and “I Speak” cards for free: <http://www.lep.gov/index.htm>

<http://www.lep.gov/ISpeakCards2004.pdf>

**GRIEVANCE POLICY – VOLUNTEERS**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program provides volunteers with the opportunity and means to lodge complaints and appeals, including violations of the confidentiality policy, where this is allowed under South Dakota law. Volunteers may file a grievance if they feel they have been discriminated against or otherwise treated unfairly. The grievance process is accessible to those who require assistance in completing the process.

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program is committed to addressing any concerns or complaints a volunteer might have about our program staff. To have a concern heard as quickly as possible, the grievance procedure to be followed is:

Step 1. Volunteers shall have the right to file a grievance. An aggrieved volunteer may consult

 with the Executive Director regarding any action, incident, or decision, which they

 believes was unfair or inequitable. Sometimes resolutions can easily be reached by

 clarifying and discussing a concern.

Step 2. If the problem is not resolved, or if the problem involves the Executive Director, the

 volunteer may refer the problem, in writing, to the Board Chairperson

 (with a copy to the Executive Director) within three (3) working days of the action,

 incident or decision. Volunteers must include a detailed explanation of the concern, the

 steps taken so far to address the concern, why resolution has not been achieved, and the desired solution. The Executive Board will review the written concerns by the next

 regularly scheduled Board Meeting.

Step 3. The Board Chairperson shall respond within five (5) workdays to the

 complainant about the resolution decided upon for the issue. Due to confidentiality

 restraints, the staff, and board members cannot always share with the volunteer exactly how an issue might be addressed or resolved.

Step 4. The Fifth Circuit CASA Program acts on all written complaints. All documentation

detailing the volunteer’s grievance kept on file in the Program’s Executive Director’s office.

Step 5. Clients may file a discrimination complaint with the SD Department of Social

 Services, Victims Services Program, 700 Governors Drive, Pierre, SD 57501.

 Phone (605) 773-5884. Email: VictimsServices@state.sd.us.

Step 6. Clients may file a discrimination complaint with the Office of Justice Programs,

 Office for Civil Rights, 810 Seventh Street N.W., Washington, DC 20531. Phone

 (202) 307-0690.

**GRIEVANCE POLICY-CLIENTS**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program is committed to addressing any concerns or complaints a client might have about our program, staff, or advocates. Clients may file a grievance for breach of confidentiality or for discrimination in the provision of services. Grievance procedures can be obtained from the Executive Director. To have a concern heard as quickly as possible, we ask that the following grievance procedure be followed. A copy of this Grievance Policy for Clients will be provided to the DSS worker assigned to a child at the time a CASA Volunteer is appointed to be the advocate for the child.

Step 1. Clients shall have the right to file a grievance. Grievances should be reported to the Executive Director as soon as possible. Sometimes resolutions can easily be reached by clarifying and discussing a concern.

Step 2. If the matter is not resolved to the satisfaction of the client, the client may present the grievance to the Board Chairperson. Include a detailed explanation of the concern, the steps taken so far to address the concern, why resolution has not been achieved, and the desired solution. The Executive Board will review the written concerns by the next regularly scheduled Board Meeting.

Step 3. Within one week after the Board Meeting, the Board Chairperson will send a letter to the client regarding the decision that the Board has made. Due to confidentiality restraints, staff and board members cannot always share with the client exactly how an issue might be addressed or resolved.

Step 4. A report detailing the client’s grievance will be placed in their case file.

Step 5. Clients may file a discrimination complaint with the SD Department of Social Services, Victims Services Program, 700 Governors Drive, Pierre, SD 57501. Phone (605) 773-5884. Email: VictimsServices@state.sd.us.

Step 6. Clients may file a discrimination complaint with the Office of Justice Programs, Office for Civil Rights, 810 Seventh Street N.W., Washington, DC 20531. Phone (202) 307-0690.

**NON-DISCRIMNATION POLICY**

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program shall follow the spirit and intent of all federal, state, and local employment law and is committed to equal employment opportunity. The Board of Directors, the Executive Director, and CASA staff of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program will not discriminate against any employee, volunteer, client, or applicant in a manner that violates the law.

It is the policy of the program to provide equal employment and volunteer opportunity to all applicants and employees based on qualifications and abilities without regard to race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under federal, state, or local law. Each person is evaluated based on personal skill and merit.

Equal employment opportunity for volunteers applies to recruiting, selecting, training, case assignments, working conditions, disciplinary actions, and termination from volunteer status.

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program will not tolerate any form of discrimination by its employees or volunteers. This includes providing services to clients without regard to their race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under federal, state, or local law. All employees are expected to cooperate fully in implementing this policy.

If a client believes that there has been discrimination in the provision of services by the Fifth Circuit CASA Program, they must follow the steps of the Grievance Policy—Clients.

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program will not tolerate any form of discrimination by its employees or volunteers, based upon race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under federal, state, or local law. All employees and volunteers are expected to cooperate fully in implementing this policy. Any employee or volunteer who believes that any other employee or volunteer of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program may have violated the Non-Discrimination Policy should report the possible violation to the Executive Director. If the Fifth Circuit CASA Program determines that a violation of this policy has occurred, it will take appropriate disciplinary action against the offending party, which can include counseling, warnings, suspensions, and termination of employment or volunteer status. Employees and volunteers who report, in good faith, violations of this policy will not be subject to retaliation. Upon completion of the investigation, the Fifth Circuit CASA Program will inform the employee or volunteer who made the complaint of the results of the investigation.

The Fifth Circuit CASA Program is also committed to complying fully with applicable disability discrimination laws and ensuring that equal opportunity exists at the Fifth Circuit CASA Program for qualified persons with disabilities. All personnel practices and activities are conducted on a non-discriminatory basis. Reasonable accommodations will be available to all qualified disabled employees and volunteers upon request, so long as the potential accommodation does not create an undue hardship on the Fifth Circuit CASA Program. Employees or volunteers who believe that they may require accommodation should discuss these needs with the Executive Director.

This non-discrimination policy shall also apply to the recruitment of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program Board of Directors and the organization’s relationship with these individuals. The Fifth Circuit CASA Program is inclusive and actively recruits, selects, and promotes qualified employees, volunteers, and board members reflective of the children served.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND RECEIPT OF VOLUNTEER POLICIES**

I hereby acknowledge receipt of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program Volunteer Handbook, which outlines the Policies of the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Program. I have carefully read the Policies and agree to follow them. I understand that it is my continuing responsibility to read and know its contents.

I further understand that the Polices are subject to change at the discretion of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program, and that the Fifth Circuit CASA Program may deviate from, discontinue, modify, or change policies, as it deems necessary, without notice. If I need clarification of any of the Policies, I will advise the Executive Director.

I have read, understand, and agree with all the policies in the Volunteer Handbook.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Please sign and return this page to the CASA Executive Director. The original form will be kept in your volunteer personnel file. A copy will be returned to you.*

**CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY AND PLEDGE**

 Any information that a volunteer learns about the Fifth Circuit CASA Program, its clients, staff, or Board, because of working with the Fifth Circuit CASA Program, and that is not otherwise publicly available, constitutes confidential information. This includes written, oral, or electronic communication between a client and a volunteer; any records or written, oral, or electronic information identifying a client; and any information relating to services provided to a client including the location of services.

 Volunteers may not disclose confidential information to anyone who is not employed by the Fifth Circuit CASA Program, or to other persons affiliated with the Fifth Circuit CASA Program who do not need to know such information to assist in rendering services.

 The disclosure, distribution, electronic transmission or copying of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program’s confidential information for purposes other than conducting a CASA case is strictly prohibited. Clients who feel their information has been inappropriately shared may file a grievance. Grievance procedures can be obtained from the Executive Director.

 An employee must immediately disclose a client’s threat to harm self or others to the local social services program.

 Any volunteer who discloses confidential Fifth Circuit CASA Program information to unauthorized persons will be subject to termination from his or her volunteer status, even if he or she does not actually benefit from the disclosure of such information.

 I understand the above policy and pledge not to disclose confidential information.

 Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Please sign and return this page to the CASA Executive Director. The original form will be kept in your volunteer personnel file. A copy will be returned to you.*

*Please present this signed and dated page to the Executive Director so that a copy of this page may be made as a record for your Personnel File.*

**Fifth Circuit CASA Electronic and Social Media Policy**

Fifth Circuit CASA (Court-Appointed Special Advocate) Program employees and volunteers, including Board members, shall refrain from posting inappropriate material, links to inappropriate websites, or undesirable comments, references, or pictures anywhere on the web where the posting directly or indirectly refers to the Fifth Circuit CASA Program or any name meant to refer to the organization.

"Inappropriate material" shall be defined as postings, depictions, or descriptions of illicit substances and/or their paraphernalia, underage drinking; harassing, hostile, false, or confidential information and any other acts that violate local, state, federal, or the Fifth Circuit CASA Program laws, statutes, rules, and regulations. Also prohibited are prejudiced or discriminatory statements against the Fifth Circuit CASA Program, and any individuals, businesses, government agencies or groups.

This policy includes public postings to any electronic media including, but not limited to, intranet and internet forums, blogs, web logs, photo blogs, online web communities, list serves, internet diaries, instant messaging, text messaging, podcasts, amateur video sites, and all web postings -- such as those in chat rooms, on bulletin boards, websites, or web pages. Wikis, public/shared email, online compilations of photographs or videos, and links to any of the foregoing items are also included.

Postings which directly or indirectly make reference to the Fifth Circuit CASA Program include, but are not limited to, postings which name CASA, the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program, or any name meant to refer to the organization; photographs or videos which depict the CASA name, logo, symbols; photographs or videos which display any Fifth Circuit CASA Program-sponsored activities; postings which link to any local, state, national, international web page referring to CASA; and usernames or email addresses which indicate an affiliation with the Fifth Circuit CASA Program.

Volunteers with the Fifth Circuit CASA Program should avoid creating the impression that the views expressed through any electric or social media outlet are anything more than personal opinions.

Individuals found to be in violation of this policy may be sanctioned at the discretion of the Fifth Circuit CASA Program Executive Director or Board of Directors.

I have read, understand, and will abide by the Fifth Circuit CASA Electronic and Social Media Policy.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, CASA Volunteer/Employee

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, CASA Case Manager/ Ex. Director

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Electronic and Social Media Policy Form