

Article 5
Court Appointed Special Advocate Program

§ 9.1-151. Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program; appointment of advisory committee.

A. There is established a Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program (the Program) that shall be administered by the Department. The Program shall provide services in accordance with this article to children who are subjects of judicial proceedings (i) involving allegations that the child is abused, neglected, in need of services, or in need of supervision or (ii) for the restoration of parental rights pursuant to § 16.1-283.2 and for whom the juvenile and domestic relations district court judge determines such services are appropriate. Court-Appointed Special Advocate volunteer appointments may continue for youth 18 years of age and older who are in foster care if the court has retained jurisdiction pursuant to § 16.1-242 and the juvenile and domestic relations district court judge determines such services are appropriate. The Department shall adopt regulations necessary and appropriate for the administration of the Program.

B. The Board shall appoint an Advisory Committee to the Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program, consisting of 15 members, one of whom shall be a judge of the juvenile and domestic relations district court or circuit court, knowledgeable of court matters, child welfare, and juvenile justice issues and representative of both state and local interests. The duties of the Advisory Committee shall be to advise the Board on all matters relating to the Program and the needs of the clients served by the Program, and to make such recommendations as it may deem desirable.

§ 9.1-152. Local court-appointed special advocate programs; powers and duties.

A. The Department shall provide a portion of any funding appropriated for this purpose to applicants seeking to establish and operate a local court-appointed special advocate program in their respective judicial districts. Only local programs operated in accordance with this article shall be eligible to receive state funds.

B. Local programs may be established and operated by local boards created for this purpose. Local boards shall ensure conformance to regulations adopted by the Board and may:

1. Solicit and accept financial support from public and private sources.
2. Oversee the financial and program management of the local court-appointed special advocate program.
3. Employ and supervise a director who shall serve as a professional liaison to personnel of the court and agencies serving children.
4. Employ such staff as is necessary to the operation of the program.

§ 9.1-153. Volunteer court-appointed special advocates; powers and duties; assignment; qualifications; training.

A. Services in each local court-appointed special advocate program shall be provided by volunteer court-appointed special advocates, hereinafter referred to as advocates. The advocate's duties shall include:

1. Investigating the case to which he is assigned to provide independent factual information to the court.
2. Submitting to the court of a written report of his investigation in compliance with the provisions of § 16.1-274. The report may, upon request of the court, include recommendations as to the child's welfare.
3. Monitoring the case to which he is assigned to ensure compliance with the court's orders.
4. Assisting any appointed guardian ad litem to represent the child in providing effective representation of the child's needs and best interests.
5. Reporting a suspected abused or neglected child pursuant to § 63.2-1509.

B. The advocate is not a party to the case to which he is assigned and shall not call witnesses or examine witnesses. The advocate shall not, with respect to the case to which he is assigned, provide legal counsel or advice to any person, appear as counsel in court or in proceedings which are part of the judicial

process, or engage in the unauthorized practice of law. The advocate may testify if called as a witness.

C. The program director shall assign an advocate to a child when requested to do so by the judge of the juvenile and domestic relations district court having jurisdiction over the proceedings. The advocate shall continue his association with each case to which he is assigned until relieved of his duties by the court or by the program director.

D. The Department shall adopt regulations governing the qualifications of advocates who for purposes of administering this subsection shall be deemed to be criminal justice employees. The regulations shall require that an advocate be at least twenty-one years of age and that the program director shall obtain with the approval of the court (i) a copy of his criminal history record or certification that no conviction data are maintained on him and (ii) a copy of information from the central registry maintained pursuant to § 63.2-1515 on any investigation of child abuse or neglect undertaken on him or certification that no such record is maintained on him. Advocates selected prior to the adoption of regulations governing qualifications shall meet the minimum requirements set forth in this article.

E. An advocate shall have no associations which create a conflict of interests or the appearance of such a conflict with his duties as an advocate. No advocate shall be assigned to a case of a child whose family has a professional or personal relationship with the advocate. Questions concerning conflicts of interests shall be determined in accordance with regulations adopted by the Department.

F. No applicant shall be assigned as an advocate until successful completion of a program of training required by regulations. The Department shall set standards for both basic and ongoing training.

§ 9.1-154. Immunity.

No staff of or volunteers participating in a program, whether or not compensated, shall be subject to personal liability while acting within the scope of their duties, except for gross negligence or intentional misconduct.

§ 9.1-155. Notice of hearings and proceedings.

The provision of § 16.1-264 regarding notice to parties shall apply to ensure that an advocate is notified of hearings and other proceedings concerning the case to which he is assigned.

§ 9.1-156. Inspection and copying of records by advocate; confidentiality of records.

A. Upon presentation by the advocate of the order of his appointment and upon specific court order, any state or local agency, department, authority, or institution, and any hospital, school, physician, or other health or mental health care provider shall permit the advocate to inspect and copy, without the consent of the child or his parents, any records relating to the child involved in the case. Upon the advocate presenting to the mental health provider the order of the advocate's appointment and, upon specific court order, in lieu of the advocate inspecting and copying any related records of the child involved, the mental health care provider shall be available within seventy-two hours to conduct for the advocate a review and an interpretation of the child's treatment records which are specifically related to the investigation.

B. An advocate shall not disclose the contents of any document or record to which he becomes privy, which is otherwise confidential pursuant to the provisions of this Code, except upon order of a court of competent jurisdiction.

§ 9.1-157. Cooperation of state and local entities.

All state and local departments, agencies, authorities, and institutions shall cooperate with the Department and with each local court-appointed special advocate program to facilitate its implementation of the Program.

§§ 9.1-158 through 9.1-160. Repealed.

Filing of CASA Reports

§ 16.1-274. Time for filing of reports; copies furnished to attorneys; amended reports; fees.

A. Whenever any court directs an investigation pursuant to subsection A of § [16.1-237](#), § [16.1-273](#), or § [9.1-153](#), or an evaluation pursuant to § [16.1-278.5](#), the probation officer, court-appointed special advocate, or other agency conducting such investigation shall file such report with the clerk of the court directing the investigation. The clerk shall furnish a copy of such report to all attorneys representing parties in the matter before the court no later than seventy-two hours, and in cases of child custody, 15 days, prior to the time set by the court for hearing the matter. If such probation officer or other agency discovers additional information or a change in circumstance after the filing of the report, an amended report shall be filed forthwith and a copy sent to each person who received a copy of the original report. Whenever such a report is not filed or an amended report is filed, the court shall grant such continuance of the proceedings as justice requires. All attorneys receiving such report or amended report shall return such to the clerk upon the conclusion of the hearing and shall not make copies of such report or amended report or any portion thereof. However, the chief judge of each juvenile and domestic relations district court may provide for an alternative means of copying and distributing reports or amended reports filed pursuant to § [9.1-153](#).