



OVERVIEW AND BUDGET REQUEST PRESENTATION

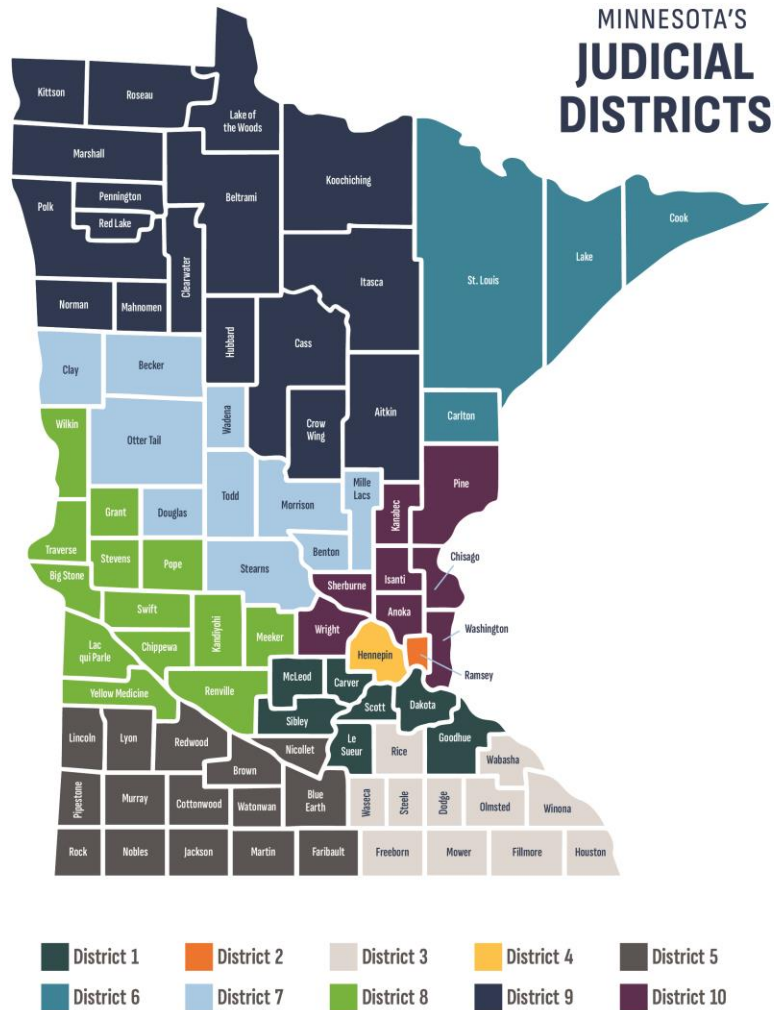
HOUSE JUDICIARY FINANCE AND CIVIL LAW COMMITTEE

Tami Baker – Olson

Program Administrator

State of Minnesota Guardian ad Litem Board

THE ROLE OF THE GUARDIAN AD LITEM BOARD



Minnesota's Guardian ad Litem Board governs a statewide program that employs Guardians ad Litem (GAL).

GALs are court-appointed advocates for children in Child Protection, Family Court and Indian Child Welfare cases.

GALS advocate for the children's best interests.

The Board ensures qualified GALs are appointed, provides training and certification, and monitors GAL performance.

Board makeup: 7 Members

3 Supreme Court appointed seats

4 Governor appointed seats

Board Membership Consists of:

1 former GAL, 2 attorneys, 1 public member, at least 3 members from judicial districts other than the First, Second, Fourth and Tenth.

LEGAL MANDATES OF THE GUARDIAN AD LITEM BOARD

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

States must require the appointment of a guardian ad litem (GAL) in every juvenile court case involving allegations of child abuse or neglect to qualify for federal foster care funds.

1975 - Minnesota Legislature Enacts Guardian ad Litem Statutes

Minnesota law mandates the appointment of a GAL in all juvenile and family court cases involving child abuse or neglect (M.S. 260C.163; M.S. 518.165).

2010- Minnesota Statute 480.35 Established the Guardian ad Litem Board

The Minnesota State Guardian ad Litem Board is an independent entity established under (M.S. 480.35) to over see and administer the state GAL Program.

Minnesota Juvenile Rules Guardians ad Litem (GALs) ensure that GALs represent children's best interests in court proceedings, including child protection and family court cases. GALs investigate, advocate, and provide reports to the court, ensuring the child's voice is heard. The rules also cover training, certification, and ethical conduct. (Minn. R. Juv. P. 40)



THE ROLE OF A GUARDIAN AD LITEM

Guardians ad Litem advocate for the best interest of children.

Some of their duties include:

Conduct independent investigations of court cases involved in Child Protection Juvenile Court, Family Court, and Indian Child Welfare cases.

Visit children monthly at family homes, foster homes, schools, and other settings.

Meet with parents, foster providers, relatives, social workers, tribal representatives, therapists, psychiatrists, doctors, teachers, and other service providers.

Provide the court with best interest recommendations through written and oral reports.



“The Guardian ad Litem is the only independent voice representing the child’s best interests during the court proceeding.”



GALs visit children monthly all across Minnesota all year round.



THE REACH OF GUARDIANS

- Active in all **87** counties
- **243** employees and **17** volunteers
- Advocated for the best interests of over **12,000** children in **2024** in both Child Protection and Family Court proceedings
- Includes nearly **1,500** Native American children on ICWA cases and **1,600** in Family Court
- Attended over **30,000** court proceedings
- Filed court reports in over **16,000** court proceedings

Full-Time Equivalent Positions by District



ICWA DIVISION HIGHLIGHTS

Statewide Coverage: ICWA Supervisors and GALs now serve all ICWA cases in Minnesota

Policy & Training: Published ICWA/MIFPA Policy Manual (NCJFCJ website) and created Foundations Training with UMD Tribal Training and Certification Partnership.

ICWA Court Reports: GAL Court Reports focus on key provisions

1. Inquiry
2. Notice
3. Qualified Expert Witness Testimony
4. Placement Preferences
5. Active Efforts

Collaboration & Outreach: Partnered with Tribes, ICWA Advisory Council, MIAC, and community stakeholders; contributed to MIFPA Workgroup (2023-2024).

Research & Best Practices: Federal HHS Children's Bureau grant collaboration with UMD, White Earth Nation, St. Louis County ICWA, and Wilder Research to study ICWA GAL models.

National Recognition: Presented at NICWA (2023, 2024) and ICWA conferences nationwide; three years at UMD ICWA Conference.



ICWA Division

Scan for ICWA/MIFPA Manual



RACE EQUITY: STRATEGIC PLAN



“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.” -2024 GAL Commitment Statement

GAL SPECIALIZED TRAINING

“GAL’s are professionals with diverse backgrounds who have extensive training and education in advocating for children.”

GALs are professionals with diverse backgrounds and extensive training and education in advocating for children.

GALs are required to have advanced training in disciplines like child development, chemical dependency, mental health, racial equity, court procedures, state statutes, community resources and more.

Indian Child Welfare Training, co-designed with the University of Minnesota Duluth Tribal Training and Certification Partnership.



PRIORITY #1: TO ADDRESS LOW WAGES

CHALLENGES:

- Low wages remain the leading cause of staff departures.
- High employee turnover rates.
- Inability to offer competitive wages or increases.
- The impending wave of retirements and inability to fill low wage positions.

CONSEQUENCES:

GAL Board and Program are unable to fulfill the multiple legal mandates to hire, train, and appoint experienced GALs to Minnesota's most vulnerable children.



Lynda is leaving because she can't work two jobs anymore.

"Our pay is not commensurate with our responsibilities and duties. The low pay doesn't reflect the importance of our investigation, our dedication to our job, and the children who rely on us to uphold their best interests."

*Exit interview data. All names and images are fictional

COMPARATIVE WAGE STUDY 2025 UPDATE

A comparative wage study was completed in 2022, and an updated wage study in 2025. Both revealed inequity in pay for Guardians ad Litem compared to others in similar roles, impacting recruitment and retention of qualified and diverse hiring pools.

State of MN Board	Job Title	Starting Wage	Hourly	Qualifications
State of MN Board of Public Defense	Dispositional Advisors	\$69,576	\$33.45	Bachelor’s
State of MN Competency Attainment Board	Forensic Navigator	\$58,004-\$90,013	\$27.78-\$43.11	Bachelor’s or relevant experience
State of MN Guardian ad Litem Board	Guardian ad Litem	\$48,153	\$23.12	Bachelor’s or relevant exp

FY 26/27 BUDGET REQUEST

FY2026/27 General Fund
Budget Starting Base Budget:
\$*****

Minnesota Guardian Ad Litem Board (GALB) FY2026/27 Final Biennial Budget Request

Employee Compensation Increases + Insurance Increases

	FY2026	FY2027	FY2026/27	%
Employee Compensation Pool	\$ 5,460,000	\$ 7,430,000	\$ 12,890,000	25.16%
\$1M Operating Increase	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	3.90%
Employee Insurance ¹	310,000	\$ 689,000	999,000	1.95%
2 GAL Supervisors	\$ 229,000	\$ 247,000	\$ 476,000	0.93%
Total	\$ 6,999,000	\$ 9,366,000	\$ 16,365,000	31.94%

¹ Insurance costs: 5.38% (FY25)/7.26% (FY26)/7.27% (FY27) Insurance Increase

“THIS BUDGET WILL **STRENGTHEN** ADVOCACY FOR THOUSANDS OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN EACH YEAR IN MINNESOTA.”

01

Strengthen advocacy for Minnesota’s most vulnerable children.

02

Ensure Financial Long-term Stability of the Guardian ad Litem Program.

03

Help Guardians ad Litem meet basic living expenses and focus solely on their work.

04

Provide wages that reflect their value and essential mandated role.

05

Improve Retention, reduce turnover , ensure continuity of advocacy for children & families.

06

Attract and retain skilled, culturally competent workforce to support children & families.

THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?



Scan QR Code to see our Program Website