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April 10th, 2025

Dear Members of the Senate Public Safety Committee,

We write to you today with deep concern regarding the current and proposed budget allocation for the Minnesota State Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program. While we remain committed to our mission of advocating for the best interests of children involved in the Child Protection system, we submit recent fiscal decisions have placed our ability to fulfill that mission for abused and neglected children in jeopardy.

The budget as currently outlined does not provide adequate funding to address critical operating needs – most urgently, staff compensation and increased insurance costs. These shortfalls come at a time when our program is experiencing unmanageable turnover. This has caused a waitlist of **159 cases**, leaving **279 kids** without a Guardian ad Litem.

Dedicated advocates are leaving not due to lack of passion for the work, but because wages have never been in pace with the demands, requirements, and duties of the job. The budget allocation being proposed will cause unsustainable caseloads, threatening the quality of representation and advocacy we are able to provide the children we serve.

Compounding this challenge, the current budget does not account for the anticipated raise in employee insurance premiums. Without increased funding to cover the increased cost of health insurance, we will experience further attrition of experienced staff, an outcome that directly undermines our ability to meet our statutory obligations and places children on a growing waitlist for representation. The long-term impact to abused and neglected children of underfunding our staff cannot be overstated.

We urge the committee to reconsider this bill and consider an increase that will allow us to offer competitive wages, provide adequate health coverage for employees, and ensure that no child in our state is left without the advocacy they deserve. We welcome an opportunity for further discussion.

Thank you for your time and your continued support of the children and families of Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Guardian ad Litem Board Chair
Administrator

Ann Ahlstrom

Guardian ad Litem State Program

Tami Baker-Olson