

**Table of Contents**  
**State Guardian ad Litem Board**

<i>Agency Profile</i> .....	1
Agency Expenditure Overview .....	4
Agency Financing by Fund .....	5
Agency Change Summary .....	6
<b><u>Additional Documents</u></b> .....	7
<i>Change Item Request - Maintain Core Guardian ad Litem Board Operations</i> .....	7
<i>Change Item Request - Volunteer Program Supervision</i> .....	10

<https://mn.gov/guardian-ad-litem/>

### AT A GLANCE

- 6,951 assigned children on July 1, 2024
- 3,750 active cases on July 1, 2024
- Two-year budget of \$51,240,000 for the fiscal year (FY) 2026-27 biennium
- 273 employees/264.95 Full-time Employees (FTEs) and 17 volunteers

### PURPOSE

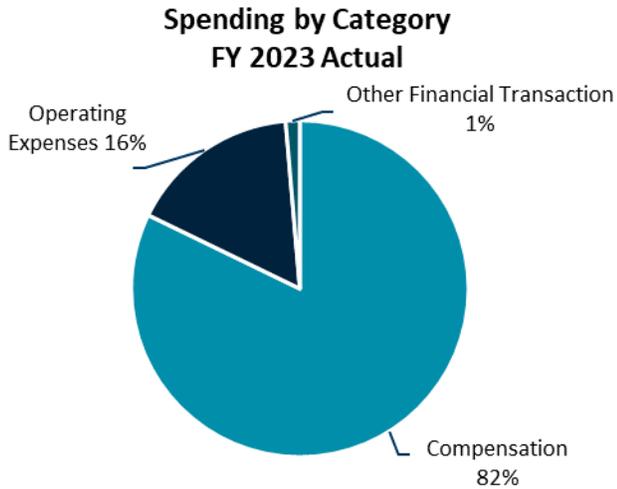
The State Guardian ad Litem Board (GALB) administers the Minnesota Guardian ad Litem Program, which exists so that all children with a court-appointed Guardian ad Litem have their primary needs met and that each judicial officer is equipped to make informed decisions for each child within the confines of available resources. The GALB represents the children's best interest throughout child protection and family court proceedings.

The GALB's purpose is to provide well trained, effective Guardians ad Litem to advocate for safe and permanent homes for the children the board represents. The GALB is committed to serving families with integrity, compassion, and a belief that community, equity, justice, and safety are paramount to a child's wellbeing. The GALB is further committed to building and sustaining a respectful and racially equitable program that promotes and advocates for the best interests of children and families through empowerment, engagement, and community.

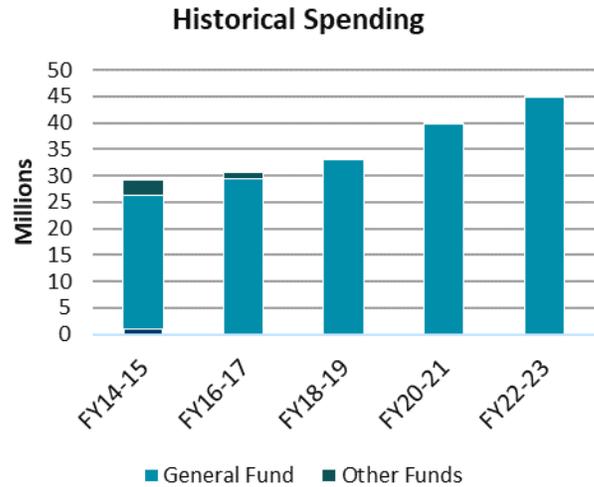
#### **Guardians ad Litem are appointed to ensure:**

- Children are safe
- Concurrent permanency planning with relative/kin begins on day one
- Children spend the least amount of time under court jurisdiction
- Children receive appropriate services, including trauma-informed care
- Parents participate in services that reflect the best interests of their children
- Physical and mental health, educational, and cultural needs of children are met
- Children are reunited with parents if it is in the best interests of the child
- Children do not re-enter the child protection system

## BUDGET



Source: Budget Planning & Analysis System (BPAS)



Source: Consolidated Fund Statement

In 2010, the Minnesota State Legislature created the State Guardian ad Litem Board to move and transition the Guardian ad Litem program out of the state court system and establish an independent Guardian ad Litem program. Historical spending began in FY 2011. The State Guardian ad Litem Board has a total FY 2026-27 biennial base budget of \$51,240,000, consisting of 82 percent of appropriated funds for compensation, and operating expenses consisting of 18 percent of appropriated funds. The budget is funded primarily by general fund appropriations.

## STRATEGIES

The GALB achieves the program mission by complying with mandated appointments for every child alleged to be abused or neglected. Further, the GALB accommodates (as resources permit) the unmet and critical need in family court.

Within their role, Guardians ad litem provide information to the court through an independent investigation, report writing and testimony. Guardians ad Litem make recommendations to the court regarding child safety and timely permanency planning that are in the best interest of the child. The GALB and program staff utilize the case management system to measure outcomes for children, as well as program performance. Lastly, program staff work as part of the Children’s Justice Initiative Team in each of the judicial districts to help ensure juvenile rule and statute compliance.

To obtain more equitable outcomes for children and families in Minnesota, the Guardian ad Litem program uses evidence-informed research to advance the GALB’s current advocacy practice to a healing practice. The GALB is shifting the lens of how children are viewed to ensure that each child is seen in the context of their family. The GALB is deepening its understanding of its own biases and how they are detrimental to children and their families. The GALB is redefining its role as healers to improve outcomes for children.

## RESULTS

Measure name	Measure type	Measure data source	Historical trend	Most recent data
Cases assigned per fiscal year	Quantity	Cases assigned per fiscal year	The number declined from 3,141 in FY 2023 to 3,125 in FY 2024	3,125 in FY 2024
Court reports filed and on-time	Quality	Court reports filed and on-time	The percentage increased from 71 percent in FY 2023 to 79 percent in FY 2024	79 percent in FY 2024
Compliance with federal and state mandates	Result	Compliance with federal and state mandates	The percentage was 98 percent in both FY 2023 and FY 2024	98 percent in FY 2024

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M.S 480.35 <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/480.35> established the State Guardian ad Litem Board; M.S. 260C.163 <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/260C.163> provides for the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem in juvenile court proceedings and M.S. 518.165 <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/518.165> for family court.

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY22	Actual FY23	Actual FY24	Estimate FY25	Forecast Base	
					FY26	FY27
<b><u>Expenditures by Fund</u></b>						
1000 - General	20,909	23,968	24,130	25,848	25,620	25,620
2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue	4		906	4,530	750	750
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,913</b>	<b>23,968</b>	<b>25,037</b>	<b>30,378</b>	<b>26,370</b>	<b>26,370</b>
Biennial Change				10,533		(2,675)
Biennial % Change				23		(5)

<b><u>Expenditures by Program</u></b>						
Guardian ad Litem	20,913	23,968	25,037	30,378	26,370	26,370
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,913</b>	<b>23,968</b>	<b>25,037</b>	<b>30,378</b>	<b>26,370</b>	<b>26,370</b>

<b><u>Expenditures by Category</u></b>						
Compensation	17,932	19,702	21,013	23,026	23,026	23,026
Operating Expenses	2,982	3,941	3,990	5,923	3,163	3,153
Other Financial Transaction	0	325	34	1,429	181	191
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,913</b>	<b>23,968</b>	<b>25,037</b>	<b>30,378</b>	<b>26,370</b>	<b>26,370</b>

<b><u>Full-Time Equivalents</u></b>	<b>228.52</b>	<b>243.93</b>	<b>247.41</b>	<b>247.41</b>	<b>247.41</b>	<b>247.41</b>
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(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY22	Actual FY23	Actual FY24	Estimate FY25	Forecast Base FY26 FY27	
<b>1000 - General</b>						
Balance Forward In		1,901		228		
Direct Appropriation	22,576	22,815	24,358	25,620	25,620	25,620
Cancellations		748				
Balance Forward Out	1,667		228			
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>20,909</b>	<b>23,968</b>	<b>24,130</b>	<b>25,848</b>	<b>25,620</b>	<b>25,620</b>
Biennial Change in Expenditures				5,101		1,262
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				11		3
Full-Time Equivalents	228.52	243.93	247.41	247.41	247.41	247.41

**2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue**

Balance Forward In	2,299	3,066	3,949	3,780		
Receipts	723	806	737	750	750	750
Balance Forward Out	3,017	3,872	3,780			
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>906</b>	<b>4,530</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>750</b>
Biennial Change in Expenditures				5,432		(3,936)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures						(72)

**2403 - Gift**

Balance Forward In	5	5	5	6	6	6
Balance Forward Out	5	5	5	6	6	6

(Dollars in Thousands)

	FY25	FY26	FY27	Biennium 2026-27
<b>Direct</b>				
<b>Fund: 1000 - General</b>				
FY2025 Appropriations	25,620	25,620	25,620	51,240
Forecast Base	25,620	25,620	25,620	51,240
<b>Dedicated</b>				
<b>Fund: 2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue</b>				
Planned Spending	4,530	750	750	1,500
Forecast Base	4,530	750	750	1,500
<b>Revenue Change Summary</b>				
<b>Dedicated</b>				
<b>Fund: 2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue</b>				
Forecast Revenues	750	750	750	1,500

# Minnesota State Guardian ad Litem Board

## FY 2026-27 Biennial Budget Change Item

### Change Item Title: Maintain Core Guardian ad Litem Board Operations

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund				
Expenditures	6,770	9,119	9,119	9,119
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Other Funds				
Expenditures	0	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact = (Expenditures – Revenues)	6,770	9,119	9,119	9,119
<b>FTEs</b>	<b>247.41</b>	<b>247.41</b>	<b>247.41</b>	<b>247.41</b>

#### Request:

The Guardian ad Litem Board seeks \$15,889,000 in the FY2026/27 biennium to increase compensation for employees, fund unavoidable health insurance premium increases, and increase operating funds by \$1,000,000 in each year to keep up with increased costs associated with transportation and inflation.

#### Rationale/Background:

The Guardian ad Litem Board must continue to hire and retain skilled, diverse, knowledgeable employees and volunteers who can ensure vigorous and effective advocacy. It is 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, and federally mandated role.

The Guardian ad Litem Board continues to experience high numbers in turnover resulting in vacancies, which is a direct result of management being unable to offer competitive wages and wage increases. Low wages continue to be the number one reason cited with staff departure. The Guardian ad Litem Board is also facing a significant retirement wave, thereby increasing the need for recruitment of diverse, qualified, and experienced staff and volunteers.

A comparative wage study was completed in 2022 which revealed an inequity in pay for Guardian ad Litem in comparison to their child welfare counterparts. The issue of pay equity is impacting recruitment and retention of qualified and diverse hiring pools. The program initiated an updated salary study in FY25 which further details the discrepancy in pay for GAL when compared with similar state, county, and court occupations. The funding request before you reflects the Guardian ad Litem Boards top budget priority this biennium, to establish an employee compensation pool with an increase of \$5,770,000 in FY2026 and \$8,119,000 in FY2027 for a total of \$13,889,000.

Not unlike our justice partners, the Guardian ad Litem Board has instituted efficiencies for cost savings such as virtual meetings, trainings and supervision and the use of Fleet vehicles to off-set mileage costs. In-person visits with children and their families however is not an area appropriate for cutting costs. In-person contacts with children are the number one determinant in quality Guardian ad Litem advocacy and the costs associated with face-to-face contacts have increased substantially.

**Proposal:**

**This change level request is not a new initiative.** The Guardian ad Litem Board seeks \$15,889,000 in the FY2026/27 biennium to increase compensation for employees, and to fund unavoidable health insurance premium increases in each year. The request further funds an essential increase in operations.

**Impact on Children and Families:**

The children our staff advocate on behalf of are among the most vulnerable population served by the state. Guardian’s ad Litem are assigned when a finding has been made by the court that a child has been abused or neglected. Guardian’s ad Litem work tirelessly to ensure that Minnesota children have their best interests represented and that the court has the information to rule confidently.

**Equity and Inclusion:**

Beginning in 2020 the Guardian ad Litem Board made a commitment to being an anti-racist organization aimed (in part) at eliminating disparities in the Minnesota Child Welfare System. Strategic Planning efforts have resulted in a 10-year plan to eradicate racial disparities and sustain an anti-racist organization. The GAL Board has hired a dedicated DEIA Program Manager to assist program leadership in achieving this goal.

The Guardian ad Litem Board has further made significant strides beginning in 2021 to improve child welfare outcomes for American Indian Youth and families through the implementation of an independent Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Division. This has included increased efforts toward improved training and support of ICWA GAL.

The Guardian ad Litem Board is committed to serving Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) with integrity, compassion, and a belief that community, equity, justice, and safety are paramount to a child’s wellbeing. We are further committed to building and sustaining a respectful and racially equitable program that promotes and advocates for the best interests of children and families through empowerment, engagement, and community.

It is imperative salaries are increased and once established, remain competitive to ensure that the Guardian ad Litem Board can recruit and retain employees from minority, ethnic and racial groups. The change level request assists in ensuring a competent and diverse workforce.

**Tribal Consultation:**

Does this proposal have a substantial direct effect on one or more of the Minnesota Tribal governments?

Yes  
 No

**List the impacted Minnesota Tribal governments.**

All 11 Minnesota Tribal Nations would be impacted. The White Earth Band of Ojibwe, Red Lake Nation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe, Fond Du Lac Band of Ojibwe, Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe, Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota community, Prairie Island Dakota Community, Lower Sioux Dakota Community and Upper Sioux Dakota Community.

**Describe the anticipated effects on the Tribe(s).**

ICWA Guardian’s ad Litem are trained to specialize in ICWA and Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA). We are already seeing the positive effects of our collaboration with Tribal Child Welfare Partners. ICWA Guardians are unique in that they understand Tribal Sovereignty and the government-to-government political relationship in Child Welfare proceedings. The anticipated effect is to lower the removal rate of American Indian children statewide in Minnesota by applying ICWA and MIFPA and ensuring the compliance of the laws. Minnesota has the highest removal rate for American Indian Children in the country. ICWA Guardian’s will ensure

that Active Efforts are provided to prevent the break-up of the Indian family, and to re-unify the Indian family at the earliest point in the case when the emergency is concluded. ICWA Guardians ensure the key tenets of ICWA and MIFPA are followed. These are Notice and Inquiry requirements, to determine a child's membership with a Tribe, Active Efforts, ensuring there is a designated Qualified Expert Witness from the Tribe to support out of home placement, that courts and counties follow ICWA/MIFPA Placement Preferences and consult tribes on placement and permanency. ICWA Guardians are aware of the historical trauma and historical context that creates the overrepresentation and visibility of American Indian children in child welfare proceedings.

It is our job to preserve the Indian Family and the tribal identity of the Indian child by keeping them connected to their families and tribal communities. The best interest of the Indian Child is inherently interwoven with the child's tribe.

**Describe your engagement with the impacted Tribe(s), including any formal Consultations, involvement of the agency tribal liaison, and indicate how tribal input was incorporated into the proposal.**

The ICWA Advisory Council is comprised of members from all 11 Minnesota tribes. They have been a keen supporter of the development of the ICWA Division for the GAL Program. They have been consulted on the creation of the ICWA Division and we have shared updates along the way. We have presented at Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) meetings to share our progress, our Vision, Mission, and program development. Tribal concerns, ideas and feedback has been used to inform the creation of the ICWA Division along with our policies, training, report format and hiring.

**Has the Tribe(s) indicated this proposal is a priority?**

The ICWA Advisory Council have written a letter of support for the proposal.

**Describe the communication plan you will be using to ensure the Tribe(s) are updated on the proposal process and how you will address any tribal concerns.**

Lynn Brave Heart is a member of the ICWA Advisory Council and is the ICWA Division Program Manager. She presents to the MN Tribes at the ICWA Advisory Council meetings and to MIAC and other ICWA conferences that include our Tribal partners.

**IT Related Proposals:**

The Guardian ad Litem Board is not seeking information technology related funding in the FY2026/27.

**Results:**

This proposal is intended to allow the Guardian ad Litem Board to continue to provide current levels of service and information to the public.

**Statutory Change(s):**

The request will not require statutory changes.

# Minnesota State Guardian ad Litem Board

## FY 2026-27 Biennial Budget Change Item

### Change Item Title: Volunteer Program Supervision

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund				
Expenditures	229	247	247	247
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Other Funds				
Expenditures	0	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact = (Expenditures – Revenues)	229	247	247	247
<b>FTEs</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

### Request:

The Guardian ad Litem Board seeks \$476,000 in the FY2026/27 to fund two supervisor level FTEs.

### Volunteers:

The Guardian ad Litem Board seeks \$476,000 in the FY2026/27 biennium to fund a heightened infrastructure for the use of volunteers. Two additional supervisory positions will ensure increased supervision and quality training and will help guarantee volunteers have the skills, knowledge, and support needed to provide high quality advocacy.

### Rationale/Background:

The Guardian ad Litem Board must continue to hire and retain skilled, diverse, knowledgeable employees and volunteers who can ensure vigorous and effective advocacy. It is 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, and federally mandated role.

### Proposal:

**This change level request is not a new initiative.** The Guardian ad Litem Board seeks \$476,000 in the FY2026/27 to fund two supervisor positions.

### Impact on Children and Families:

The children our staff advocate on behalf of are among the most vulnerable population served by the state. Guardian’s ad Litem are assigned when a finding has been made by the court that a child has been abused or neglected. Guardian’s ad Litem work tirelessly to ensure that Minnesota children have their best interests represented and that the court has the information to rule confidently.

### Equity and Inclusion:

Beginning in 2020 the Guardian ad Litem Board made a commitment to being an anti-racist organization aimed (in part) at eliminating disparities in the Minnesota Child Welfare System. Strategic Planning efforts have resulted in a 10-year plan to eradicate racial disparities and sustain an anti-racist organization. The GAL Board has hired a dedicated DEIA Program Manager to assist program leadership in achieving this goal.

The Guardian ad Litem Board has further made significant strides beginning in 2021 to improve child welfare outcomes for American Indian Youth and families through the implementation of an independent Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Division. This has included increased efforts toward improved training and support of ICWA GAL.

The Guardian ad Litem Board is committed to serving Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) with integrity, compassion, and a belief that community, equity, justice, and safety are paramount to a child’s wellbeing. We are further committed to building and sustaining a respectful and racially equitable program that promotes and advocates for the best interests of children and families through empowerment, engagement, and community.

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**Tribal Consultation:**

Does this proposal have a substantial direct effect on one or more of the Minnesota Tribal governments?

Yes  
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**List the impacted Minnesota Tribal governments.**

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**Statutory Change(s):**

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