SHORT TITLE: Children; dependent and delinquent children; responsibilities of the court-appointed special advocate; effective date.

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

2nd Session of the 44th Legislature (1994)

SENATE BILL NO. 1103 By: Hendrick

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to children; amending 10 O.S. 1991, Section 1109, as amended by Section 22, Chapter 298, O.S.L. 1992 (10 O.S. Supp. 1993, Section 1109), which relates to dependent and delinquent children; modifying responsibilities of the court-appointed special advocate; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 10 O.S. 1991, Section 1109, as amended by Section 22, Chapter 298, O.S.L. 1992 (10 O.S. Supp. 1993, Section 1109), is amended to read as follows:

Section 1109. A. No information gained by questioning a child nor any evidence subsequently obtained as a result of such information shall be admissible into evidence against the child unless the questioning about any alleged offense by any law enforcement officer or investigative agency, or employee of the court, or the Department of Human Services is done in the presence of the parents, guardian, attorney, or legal custodian of the child. No such questioning shall commence until the child and his parents, or guardian, or other legal custodian have been fully advised of the constitutional and legal rights of the child, including the right to be represented by counsel at every stage of the proceedings, and the right to have counsel appointed by the court if the parties are

without sufficient financial means; provided, however, that no legal aid or other public or charitable legal service shall make claim for compensation as contemplated herein. It is further provided that where private counsel is appointed in such cases, the court shall set reasonable compensation and order the payment out of the court fund.

B. If the parents, guardian, or other legal custodian of the child requests an attorney and is found to be without sufficient financial means, counsel shall be appointed by the court if a petition has been filed alleging that the child is a deprived child, a child in need of supervision, or a child in need of treatment, or if termination of parental rights is a possible remedy, provided that the court may appoint counsel without such request, if it deems representation by counsel necessary to protect the interest of the parents, guardian or other legal custodian. If the child is not otherwise represented by counsel, whenever a petition is filed pursuant to the provisions of Section 1103 of this title, the court shall appoint a separate attorney, who shall not be a district attorney, for the child regardless of any attempted waiver by the parent or other legal custodian of the child of the right of the child to be represented by counsel.

C. Whenever a petition is filed alleging that a child is a deprived child, a delinquent child or a child in need of supervision, the court may appoint a guardian ad litem for the child at any time subsequent to the filing of the petition and shall appoint a guardian ad litem upon the request of the child or his attorney and whenever a court-appointed special advocate is available to the court to serve as a guardian ad litem regardless of whether or not a guardian ad litem has been requested by the child or his attorney. The availability of a court-appointed special advocate shall be determined by the executive director of the court appointed special advocate program for the county.

1. The guardian ad litem shall not be a district attorney, an employee of the office of the district attorney, an employee of the court, an employee of a juvenile bureau established pursuant to the provisions of Sections 1201 through 1210 of this title, or an employee of any public agency having duties or responsibilities towards the child.

2. Whenever a court-appointed special advocate is available for appointment as a guardian ad litem as provided by this subsection, the court shall give priority to the appointment of a court-appointed special advocate as the guardian ad litem of a deprived child.

D. For the purpose of this section and Section 846 of Title 21 of the Oklahoma Statutes, a "court-appointed special advocate" or "CASA" means a responsible adult, other than an attorney for the parties, who has volunteered to be available for appointment by the court to serve as an officer of the court and represent any child and his or her parents wherein a juvenile petition has been filed, based on the availability of volunteers, until discharged by the court. It shall be the duty and responsibility of the court-appointed special advocate to advocate for the best interests of the child and to assist the child in obtaining a permanent, safe, homelike placement. The court-appointed special advocate may also assist the parents in acquiring appropriate parenting skills.

The court-appointed special advocate shall be given access to the court file and access to all records and reports relevant to the case and to any records and reports of examination of the child's parent or other custodian, made pursuant to this section or Section 846 of Title 21 of the Oklahoma Statutes.

A court-appointed special advocate shall serve without compensation and shall have such other qualifications and duties and responsibilities as may be prescribed by rule by the Supreme Court. Any person participating in a judicial proceeding as a

court-appointed special advocate shall be presumed prima facie to be acting in good faith and in so doing shall be immune from any civil liability that otherwise might be incurred or imposed. Any person serving in positions of management of a CASA organization, including members of the Board of Directors acting in good faith, shall be immune from any civil liability or any vicarious liability for the negligence of any CASA organization advocates, managers, or directors.

All records concerning child abuse shall be confidential and shall be open to inspection only to persons duly authorized by the state or United States in connection with the performance of their official duties. It shall be unlawful and a misdemeanor for the Commission, or any employee working under the Department of Human Services, any other public officer or employee, or any court-appointed special advocate (CASA), to furnish or permit to be taken off of the records any information therein contained for commercial, political or any other unauthorized purpose.

E. The district attorney shall prepare and prosecute any case or proceeding within the purview of Chapter 51 of this title.

SECTION 2. This act shall become effective September 1, 1994.

44-2-1699 CJ