

- SUBJECT:** Leave for certain state employees who volunteer for CASA
- COMMITTEE:** Human Services — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rose, Herrero, Darby, Elkins, Hernandez, Hughes, Naishtat, Walle  
0 nays  
1 absent — Legler
- WITNESSES:** For — Ed Davis, Texas CASA; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Christine Gendron, Texas Network of Youth Services; Noelita Lugo, Texans Care for Children; Diana Martinez, TexProtects, The Texas Association for the Protection of Children; Tara Snowden, Child Advocates San Antonio)  
  
Against — Johana Scot, Parent Guidance Center
- BACKGROUND:** Government Code, ch. 661 provides guidelines for state employee leave such as sick leave, holidays, and vacation time. Subch. Z addresses miscellaneous leave for certain state employees for a variety of reasons, such as emergency leave for National Guard or military service, Red Cross volunteers, parental leave, voting, donating blood, bone marrow or organ donation, assistance dog training for employees with disabilities, and amateur radio operators. Chapter 661 applies to employees of the executive and judicial branches of the state government.
- DIGEST:** HB 1462 would add Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteers to the list of persons and activities for which certain state employees could take paid leave under Government Code, ch. 661, subch. Z. A state employee could be granted up to five hours each month to participate in mandatory training or perform volunteer services for CASA without a deduction in salary or loss of leave time.
- The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2009.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

In fiscal 2008, CASA was able to serve over 20,000 of the 47,000 children in foster care. However, in order to help more children, CASA needs more volunteers. HB 1462 would help provide more volunteers by allowing state employees to assist CASA without financial or leave repercussions. The bill would create a new pool of state employee volunteers that could assist in local programs, furthering CASA's mission of helping Texas children in crisis situations.

HB 1462 simply would build upon existing statutory allowances within the Government Code that provide state employees paid leave time to participate in a variety of worthy causes benefiting the community. Allowing this additional leave option would have no significant fiscal impact on the state, and the enormous contributions that state employees are able to make while participating in the broad range of community services outlined in subchapter Z far outweigh the limited number of hours an employee is away from work in the course of a year. HB 1462 would add yet another worthy cause to the long list from which state employees may already choose to participate.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

HB 1462 would single out one organization for which state employees could volunteer, which would be fair neither to other worthy non-profits in need of assistance nor to the employees. CASA is an important and noble cause, but volunteering in child abuse situations is not for everyone. Some state employees may prefer community service that involves working with the elderly or disabled, helping protect the environment, or working in animal shelters. These too are worthy causes, and they deserve the same consideration that CASA would receive under HB 1462.

The bill would not be fair to taxpayers. Taxpayers pay the salaries of state employees, and HB 1462 would allow them to take off up to 60 hours per year to volunteer for CASA. The LBB estimates \$2.3 million in loss of productive time if only one percent of state employees took advantage of the program under the bill. If taxpayers are going to pay for state workers to perform community service, a variety of services should benefit— not just one.

NOTES: The companion bill, SB 1051 by Uresti, passed the Senate by 31-0 on the Local and Uncontested Calendar on April 9 and has been referred to the House Human Services Committee.