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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 300

Offered January 23, 2025

Commending Fairfax Court Appointed Special Advocates.

Patron—Favola

WHEREAS, for more than 35 years, Fairfax Court Appointed Special Advocates has served and represented the legal interests of abused or neglected children, most of whom enter the foster care system; and

WHEREAS, established in 1989, Fairfax Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) has worked with nearly 9,000 children over the course of its history; and

WHEREAS, Fairfax CASA has trained close to 1,900 community members to be volunteer advocates, who are thoroughly vetted, trained, and supervised by staff; and

WHEREAS, volunteers for Fairfax CASA meet with their assigned children twice monthly to build relationships based on trust and understanding, attend all meetings that involve those children to advocate for their needs, and write comprehensive court reports for every hearing, with recommendations as to what is in a child's best interest; and

WHEREAS, Fairfax CASA volunteers have donated millions of dollars in services to Fairfax County, including more than \$3.5 million since the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, Fairfax CASA works collaboratively with service providers across the region, providing leadership to numerous committees, coalitions, planning committees, and boards, and is an integral part of the Virginia network of CASA programs; and

WHEREAS, the staff members and volunteers of Fairfax CASA are a valued part of the child welfare system, ensuring that no child slips through the cracks of the system meant to protect them; they act as the eyes and ears of the Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, providing information that is up-to-date, accurate, and unbiased; and

WHEREAS, Fairfax CASA supported the passage of the Fostering Futures program that took effect in July 2016 and extends foster care services to youth aging out of foster care at 18, allowing them to receive support until they turn 21; the program helps young people transition to adulthood by providing housing, education, employment assistance, and other resources to promote independence; and

WHEREAS, in 2013, Fairfax CASA received the prestigious Child Advocacy Award from the Virginia State Bar, recognizing the organization's outstanding work in advocating for the needs and rights of children in court; and

WHEREAS, Fairfax CASA has developed strong relationships with the Fairfax County Department of Family Services and other local child welfare organizations that have improved case management, support services, and the overall well-being of children in foster care; and

WHEREAS, Fairfax CASA has made significant strides in increasing public awareness of child abuse and neglect issues through outreach projects, educational events, and fundraising efforts, garnering more community support and volunteer engagement; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Fairfax Court Appointed Special Advocates on the occasion of its 35th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Fairfax Court Appointed Special Advocates as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for their life-changing services on behalf of abused or neglected children.