



**South Dakota
Unified Judicial System**
State Court Administrator's Office

605.773.3474
500 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

Annual SD CASA Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: May 22, 2026

Time: 1:31 PM – approximately 4:33 PM

Location: Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Commissioners' Present:

- Judge Patrick Smith
- JoLynn Bostrom
- Crystal Aman
- Kristie Fiegen – Chairwoman

A quorum was established.

UJS Staff Present: Sara Kelly and Jeff Tronvold

CASA program representatives attending: Stacy Starzl-Hansen, Jackie Horton, Stacey Tieszen, Julie Wermers, Amy Cermak, Gloria Hutson, Julie Hand, Kehala Two Bulls.

Guests: Judge Gregg Magera, Julie Benedit, Anette Beasley, Chris Maxwell, Carrie Mees, Virgena Wieseler, Tiffany Even, Nicole Ownes, and Adam Altman

Call to Order at 8:30 AM Central Time.

Roll call was conducted verbally.

Commission Fiegen and all the Commissioners stated their appreciation to all the CASA programs across the state. The strong operations, volunteer recruitment efforts, and commitment to giving a voice to children in need are making a real difference.





South Dakota Unified Judicial System

State Court Administrator's Office

605.773.3474
500 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

The January 26 meeting minutes were presented for approval.

- Motion to approve: Judge Patrick Smith
- Second: JoLynn Bostrom
- Motion carried unanimously.

State CASA Association Update

Sara Kelly provided updates regarding:

- 2025 CASA activities
- Delays from National CASA regarding annual surveys
- ADA website compliance requirements
- Website accessibility updates completed through Epicosity
- Ongoing efforts to ensure all posted materials meet ADA standards
- Upcoming site visits planned for late summer and early fall 2026

Commissioner Fiegen stated she expressed her appreciation to Chief Justice Steven Jensen for the UJS supporting the work of CASA volunteers and commissioners. Chief Justice Jensen expressed his appreciation for CASA programs across South Dakota.

Open Meetings Law Annual Review

Jeff Tronvold, legal counsel for the Unified Judicial System, presented the annual Open Meetings Law review as required by 2025 legislation. Topics included:

- Public notice requirements
- Quorum definitions
- Electronic communications
- Executive session rules
- Public comment requirements
- Documentation and minutes deadlines
- Penalties for violations
- Transparency expectations for public bodies





South Dakota Unified Judicial System

State Court Administrator's Office

605.773.3474
500 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

The Commission acknowledged completion of the annual Open Meetings Law review requirement.

Program Presentations & Funding Discussions

East Central CASA

Julie Wermers presented updates on East Central CASA activities and expansion efforts.

Highlights included:

- Advocacy for 132 children across 27 cases
- 36 volunteers contributing approximately 2,000 hours
- Increased fundraising success through "Chase the Ace"
- Strategic planning efforts using the AAA Framework (Ambassador, Advocate, Asker)
- Executive Director succession planning underway
- Continued volunteer recruitment challenges and support efforts

Discussion included:

- Clarification regarding prior expansion funding allocations
 - Board development and recruitment
 - Future leadership transition planning
-

Northern Hills CASA

Amy Cermak presented updates on the Northern Hills CASA.

Highlights included:

- 80 children served in six counties
 - 34 volunteers contributed over 5,000 hours and 32,000 travel miles
 - 96% volunteer retention rate
 - Strong board engagement and strategic planning
 - 40th anniversary celebration planned for June 7, 2026
 - Ongoing challenges with DSS staffing and communication
 - Financial sustainability planning and reserve development
-





South Dakota Unified Judicial System

State Court Administrator's Office

605.773.3474
500 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

Discussion included:

- Lack of funding support from Meade County
- Strategic planning goals
- Volunteer assignment and waitlist processes
- Long-term funding sustainability concerns

Seventh Circuit CASA

Kehala Two Bulls presented updates for Seventh Circuit CASA.

Highlights included:

- 24 new volunteers sworn in during 2025
- 80 active volunteers serving 175 children
- 100% employee retention
- Increased fundraising and public awareness efforts
- Expanded media outreach and community engagement
- Strong board committee participation
- Significant increase in foundation support funding

Discussion included:

- Board recruitment and skill mix
- Outreach to Ellsworth Air Force Base community
- Managing high child welfare caseloads
- Volunteer retention and public messaging efforts
- Acknowledgement of great effort in 2025's volunteer recruitment and a financial turnaround from a structural deficient to a surplus

Southeast CASA

Stacy Starzl Hansen presented updates for Southeast CASA.

Highlights included:





South Dakota Unified Judicial System

State Court Administrator's Office

605.773.3474
500 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

- Advocacy for 53 children across 39 abuse and neglect cases
- 34 CASA volunteers with 19 active assignments
- Staff advocacy support for children when volunteers unavailable
- Office expansion and improved volunteer support
- Increased donations and successful fundraising growth
- New part-time program manager hired through expansion funding
- Community awareness and partnership activities throughout all five counties served

Discussion included:

- Challenges related to geographic travel demands
- Multi-volunteer case assignments
- Positive impact of newly hired program manager
- Board representation goals across all counties served

First Circuit CASA

Jackie Horton presented updates for First Circuit CASA.

Highlights included:

- Serving 82 children from 43 families across 8 counties
- Maintained a zero-child waitlist (A0 status)
- Volunteers contributed 1,649 advocacy hours
- Attended 169 court hearings
- Submitted 119 court reports
- 41% reunification rate for closed cases in 2025
- Notable permanency success: four siblings, in care for nearly five years and experiencing multiple placements, were ultimately adopted together
- Improved fundraising efficiency (direct mail reduced cost by \$0.09 per dollar raised)
- Fundraising returns:
 - \$4.91 returned per \$1 invested (direct mail)
 - \$38.64 returned per \$1 invested (community breakfast)
- Established an endowment through the South Dakota Community Foundation
- Endowment initially funded through a mature CD and Legacy Challenge Grant, with an additional \$20,000 contribution.

Discussion included:

- Inquiry regarding endowment strategy and long-term donor engagement
- Discussion of legacy giving and estate planning outreach





South Dakota Unified Judicial System

State Court Administrator's Office

605.773.3474
500 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

- Recommendation to engage local estate planners and attorneys for donor education events (“coffee meetings” concept)

Sioux Falls CASA

Stacey Tieszen presented updates for Sioux Falls CASA:

Highlights included:

- Staff of 10 (2 part-time)
- Long-term staff retention highlighted (20-year bookkeeping assistant; front desk support noted)
- 23 new volunteers trained in 2024
- 17 additional volunteers trained year-to-date (2025)
- 6 volunteers scheduled for July training
- Goal: 25–30 new volunteers annually
- Strong internal volunteer support culture emphasized
- High responsiveness and retention focus among supervisors and staff
- Continued collaboration with child protection partners to improve communication
- Planning staff attendance at Texas CASA Conference (2026) as an alternative to National CASA conference due to its discontinuation
- Focus on evidence-based practices and collaborative family engagement models
- Red Cape” campaign exceeded goal:
 - Goal: \$90,000
 - Raise: \$100,431+
- Golf tournament fundraising model adjusted for cost efficiency:
 - Cost ratio improved from \$0.63 to \$0.43 per dollar raised
- Continued reliance on grants and sponsorships
- Budget currently operating in a planned deficit, with uncertainty in federal/state funding streams (Volcker grant discussed)
- Planning staff attendance at Texas CASA Conference (2026) as an alternative to National CASA conference due to its discontinuation
- Focus on evidence-based practices and collaborative family engagement models

Discussion included:

- Recognition of volunteer recruitment success and donor growth
- Discussion of cost-benefit analysis of fundraising events
- Inquiry into budget assumptions with structural deficient and grant dependency





South Dakota Unified Judicial System

State Court Administrator's Office

605.773.3474
500 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

-
- Clarification provided that funding requests were based on current receipts with conservative forecasting
 - Discussion of statewide training opportunities and conference participation support
-

Commission Financial Discussion

- Total available traditional funding discussed: **\$198,000**
 - Funds to be allocated among CASA programs (excluding 5th/6th circuits and state administrative funding)
 - Separate funding sources reserved for state-level expenses (approx. \$10,000 designated, with potential adjustment to \$4,000 retained for expansion purposes)
 - Commission agreed to revisit allocation following break
-

Adjournment / Break

- Commission announced a **15-minute recess at approximately 10:30 AM**
 - Members requested to review funding allocation proposals during break
-

Sixth Circuit CASA

Julie Hand, Virgena Wieseler, and Chris Maxwell presented on the Sixth Circuit CASA:

Highlights included:

- Completing community awareness and recruitment events
 - 16 applications, 8 sworn in and 4 to start training in June 2026
 - Conduct group presentations
 - Social media and radio spots highlighting the program and need for volunteers
 - Total of 10 board members
 - Complete board trainings and ad hoc committees
 - Board will review and evaluate the contract with Maxwell Strategies
 - Second annual fundraiser is set for May 2026
 - Received large matching grants
-





South Dakota Unified Judicial System

State Court Administrator's Office

605.773.3474
500 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

-
- Plan to expand outreach to the outlying counties.

Discussion included:

- Inquiry regarding executive directors moving forward depending on election results. The program will maintain complete transparency.

Fifth Circuit CASA

Gloria Hutson presented updates on the Fifth Circuit CASA:

Highlights included:

- Program is moving to a different bookkeeper. The new bookkeeper is a CPA with an understanding of nonprofits
- Hired and trained support staff
- Seeing a benefit of community events in rural areas
 - Volunteer recruitment
 - Funding opportunities
- Looking to expand board membership
- Selected for an Avera partnership award

Discussion included:

- Acknowledge the challenges in starting new programs
- Questioned staff resources on events and activities
 - Needs to be a balance of staff time and resources

East Central CASA

Julie Wermers presented previously on the activities of East Central CASA and the expansion into the Watertown area. Julie noted they are seeing more cases in the Watertown area than in the Brookings area.





South Dakota Unified Judicial System

State Court Administrator's Office

605.773.3474
500 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

Discussion:

Commissioner Fiegen noted the December 2025 meeting gave awards for January 2026 pay out of \$30,000 to both Fifth and Sixth Circuit for the first half of 2026. The expansion funds for establish programs, only East Central applied, and Fifth Circuit applied for new program expansion for additional staff.

Awards Discussion:

Establish Program – General CASA Fund:

Commissioner Bostrom moved to award

First Circuit CASA - \$32,500

Southeast CASA - \$26,500

Sioux Falls CASA - \$47,000

East Central CASA - \$32,500

Northern Hills CASA - \$26,500

Seventh Circuit CASA - \$33,000

Total - \$198,000

Second by Judge Smith. Commissioner Aman agreed with the amounts after some discussion.
Voice Vote – All in favor – Motion carries.

New Programs and Expansion – Additional CASA Fund:

Commissioner Fiegen moved to award

Fifth and Sixth Circuit CASAs - \$30,000 each for the second half of the year (July 1 – December 31, 2026).

Fifth Circuit CASA - \$15,000 for expansion of new program for 2026.

East Central CASA \$11,000 for expansion of an established program for the 2027 calendar year.

State Organization - \$4,000

Second by Commission Aman. Voice Vote – All in favor – Motion carries.

Public Comment: No one signed up for public comment.

December meeting will be sent after a meeting poll

Commissioner Bostrom moved to adjourn, second by Judge Smith, all approved.

Meeting adjourned at 11:38 AM

