

Court Lingo

As Court Appointed Special Advocates, we are required to submit reports and testify regarding what is in our CASA child's best interest. This process can be intimidating to the most seasoned of advocates - laws change and there is always a new acronym for a service, court proceeding, or agency. Below is a guide for some of the frequently used terms that you will hear during your tenure as a CASA Volunteer:

DCFS: Department of Children and Family Services, formerly named Office of Community Services (OCS). This is the agency that investigates allegations of abuse and neglect, finds placements for children in State custody, and provides a plan and makes service referrals for the child and parents. There are several divisions of this agency that CASA Volunteers have contact with. The **“CI” Worker (Child Investigator)** is the person that investigates the allegations of abuse or neglect. The **Foster Care Worker** is responsible for placement of the child and developing a plan for the family to work towards reunification. The foster care worker makes referrals for services and monitors the family's compliance with the plan. It is also the responsibility of the Foster Care Worker to conduct the **FTM (Family Team Meeting)** and to provide the court with a report of the family's progress. The foster care worker also makes recommendations to the court regarding permanency. You will interact with the foster care worker for your CASA case.

FTM (Family Team Meeting): This conference is facilitated by the foster care worker for the family. This is where a plan is developed for the family to address the reasons that a child/children came into care. The parents, parent's attorneys, child/children, children's attorney, foster parents, and CASA Volunteers are invited to this meeting and participate in developing the plan. This plan is filed with the court and is an official part of the court record.

CINC: This stands for Child In Need of Care. All CASA Cases must be CINC cases. You will hear this term often as it refers to the proceedings that deal with children that are alleged victims of abuse or neglect.

Continued Custody Hearing: This is also referred to as the “72 Hour Hearing.” When a child is taken into care there must be a hearing before a judge within 3 working days or 72 working hours to determine if there was probable cause for the child to enter foster care and remain in the custody of the state.

Answer Hearing: This is where the parents formally respond to the allegations that are made against them. Parents have the following options at this hearing: They can **Admit to/Accept** the allegations and work a case plan to reunify with their child/children. A parent may choose to **Deny** the allegations and the state will then have to prove the allegations are true. The parent is able to work a case plan with DCFS while they are awaiting trial. A common option

that parents choose is to **Stipulate**; this means they are neither accepting nor denying the allegations but agree that their child/children are “Children In Need of Care” and want to work a plan for reunification.

Adjudication Hearing: This proceeding occurs when a parent has denied the allegations of abuse or neglect. The State of Louisiana must present evidence proving that the allegations are true. The parent is entitled to legal representation and is appointed an attorney if he or she cannot afford one. The parent’s attorney’s role is to prove the allegations to be untrue. If the State cannot prove the allegations, children are returned to their parents.

Disposition Hearing: This proceeding occurs after a child was adjudicated at the Adjudication Hearing. The Department of Children and Family Services submits a copy of the case plan that was completed at the first Family Team Conference for approval by the Court. The Court also approves or disproves the permanency goal (i.e. Reunification, Adoptions, Guardianship to a Relative, or Alternative Permanent Living Arrangement-APLA). The CASA Volunteer submits their first court report at this proceeding.

Review Hearing: The law mandates that a Review Hearing be held every six months when a child is in care. This is the proceeding where you provide a report to the judge regarding what is happening with that child and advocate for the child’s best interest. The foster care worker will also submit a report to the judge outlining the family’s progress. During this proceeding the judge must decide if the case plan is appropriate, if the placement is appropriate, and may court order services for the child and family.

FPR (Federal Permanency Review): This proceeding must occur when the child has been in care for 12 months. This is the proceeding where the judge rules on a permanent plan for the child; remember, foster care should be temporary. CASA Volunteers provide reports to the judge at this proceeding to make recommendations regarding what is the most appropriate plan for this child to have a safe and permanent home as quickly as possible.

TPR (Termination of Parental Rights): If a child’s goal is changed to adoption at the FPR, the state must begin proceedings to terminate the parent’s rights so the child can be freed for adoption. This stage of the court proceedings requires an Answer Hearing and a trial if the parent’s choose to not voluntarily relinquish their rights.