

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 1239**

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

*Leah Cole*

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act relative to best interest representation of children.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:
<i>Leah Cole</i>	<i>12th Essex</i>
<i>James R. Miceli</i>	<i>19th Middlesex</i>
<i>Michael O. Moore</i>	<i>Second Worcester</i>
<i>Shaunna L. O'Connell</i>	<i>3rd Bristol</i>
<i>Angelo L. D'Emilia</i>	<i>8th Plymouth</i>
<i>Diana DiZoglio</i>	<i>14th Essex</i>
<i>Robert L. Hedlund</i>	<i>Plymouth and Norfolk</i>
<i>Kevin J. Kuros</i>	<i>8th Worcester</i>
<i>Joan B. Lovely</i>	<i>Second Essex</i>
<i>Chris Walsh</i>	<i>6th Middlesex</i>

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By Ms. Cole of Peabody, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 1239) of Leah Cole and others relative to children's interests in cases of abuse or neglect resulting in judicial proceedings. The Judiciary.

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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**In the One Hundred and Eighty-Ninth General Court  
(2015-2016)**  
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An Act relative to best interest representation of children.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 119, as appearing in the 2012 Official Edition, is hereby amended  
2 by inserting after Section 39F the following section:-

3 Section 39F ½. A court shall appoint a volunteer guardian ad litem (GAL) known as a  
4 Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) to represent the child's best interests in every case of  
5 abuse or neglect that results in a judicial proceeding. The CASA shall have the same duties and  
6 responsibilities as a GAL and shall be trained by and function under the auspices of a  
7 CASA/GAL program, formed and operating under the guidelines established by the National  
8 Court Appointed Special Advocate Association. The purpose of CASA is to advocate for timely  
9 placement of children in permanent, safe, and stable homes.

10 Under the supervision of the CASA program, it shall be the duty of a CASA advocate to:

11 (a) provide independent, factual information to the court regarding the children and cases  
12 to which they are assigned;

13 (b) advocate on behalf of the children involved in the cases to which they are assigned  
14 what they perceive to be in the best interests of the children; and

15 (c) Monitor proceedings in cases to which they have been assigned and advise and assist  
16 the court in its determination of the best interests of the children involved.

17 The CASA advocate:

18 (1) shall be notified by the court of all court proceedings and hearings of any kind  
19 pertaining to a child for whom he is assigned;

20 (2) shall be notified by the department of all administrative review hearings concerning  
21 the case to which he has been assigned;

22 (3) shall be entitled to attend all court proceedings and hearings of any kind pertaining to  
23 a child for whom he is assigned;

24 (4) may be called as a witness in the proceedings by any party or by the court and may  
25 request of the court the opportunity to appear as a witness; and

26 (5) Shall be given access to all portions of the court record relating to proceedings  
27 pertaining to a child for whom he is assigned and to the child's family.

28 CASA advocates shall be appointed by the presiding judge to represent the best interests  
29 of the child, subject to judicial discretion, and only after confirmation from the director of the  
30 local CASA program that the CASA advocate has been properly screened and trained.