

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

Senate Research Center  
88R2243 MM-F

H.B. 474  
By: Hull (Zaffirini)  
Health & Human Services  
5/1/2023  
Engrossed

### **AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT**

Court-appointed volunteer advocate programs (CASA) are an important part of the Texas child welfare system. However, an evaluation of CASA published in 2019, "The Effect of CASA on Child Welfare Permanency Outcomes," showed negative outcomes for children working with these special advocates.

H.B. 474 seeks to improve and strengthen these localized programs by requiring accountability and transparency so that the programs can be the best possible quality for the families they serve. What's more, H.B. 474 adds defined terms to differentiate between active and inactive trained volunteers and requires each program to provide a grievance process for the individuals being served, which will allow for more standardization across programs.

H.B. 474 amends current law relating to certain requirements regarding court-appointed volunteer advocate programs.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

### **SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS**

SECTION 1. Amends Section 264.601, Family Code, by adding Subdivisions (1-a) and (1-b) to define "active volunteer advocate" and "inactive volunteer advocate."

SECTION 2. Amends Section 264.603(a), Family Code, to require that the administrative contract between the Health and Human Services Commission and a statewide nonprofit organization that has expertise in the dynamics of child abuse and neglect include measurable goals and objectives relating to the number of active volunteer advocates in the program and inactive volunteer advocates in the program.

SECTION 3. Amends Section 264.604(a), Family Code, to provide that a person is eligible for a contract under Section 264.602 (Contracts with Advocate Programs) only if the person is a public or private nonprofit entity that operates a volunteer advocate program that meets certain criteria, including having adopted a grievance procedure to address complaints regarding negligence or misconduct related to a volunteer advocate's duties under Section 107.002 (Powers and Duties of Guardian ad Litem for Child) and maintaining accurate records regarding active volunteer advocates and inactive volunteer advocates under the program.

SECTION 4. Effective date: September 1, 2023.