

OREGON

GAL Volunteer Handbook

2026 Edition

Guardian Ad Litem Support Network

Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS)
Child Welfare

ORS Chapter 419B · Oregon CASA Network
GAL Appointment: ORS 419B.231 · State ICWA: ORS 419B.600

■ ICWA + ORICWA — Two Layers of Tribal Child Welfare Protections

1. Program Overview

Oregon's Guardian Ad Litem system operates through county-based CASA programs affiliated with **Oregon CASA Network**, with court-appointed volunteer or attorney GALs in counties without CASA programs. The state child welfare agency is **Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) — Child Welfare**.

Oregon's dependency framework is governed by **ORS Chapter 419B — Juvenile Code: Dependency**. Dependency proceedings are heard in the Juvenile Division of the Circuit Court. Oregon is distinctive for having both federal ICWA and a state-level Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act (ORICWA, ORS 419B.600 et seq.) that extends tribal protections beyond federal law.

State Agency	Oregon ODHS — Child Welfare
GAL Umbrella Org	Oregon CASA Network
Governing Code	ORS Chapter 419B
Court	Circuit Court (Juvenile Division)
GAL Appointment	ORS 419B.231
State ICWA Statute	ORS 419B.600 et seq. (ORICWA)
Federally Recognized Tribes	9 tribes within Oregon

2. Legal Foundation

Oregon's dependency framework is anchored in ORS Chapter 419B. Oregon is one of a small number of states with its own state-level Indian Child Welfare Act (ORICWA) extending protections beyond federal ICWA — making both layers of law important for Oregon GALs.

ORS 419B.231

GAL Appointment & Duties

Authorizes court appointment of a CASA volunteer as GAL in dependency proceedings. GAL shall investigate facts, advocate for child's best interests, and make written recommendations. GALs have access to all records and may appeal adverse orders.

ORS 419B.100

Jurisdiction — Dependency and Neglect

Establishes the juvenile court's jurisdiction over children due to abuse, neglect, or without proper parental care. This threshold triggers ODHS involvement and juvenile court jurisdiction.

ORS 419B.337

Reasonable Efforts

Requires ODHS to make reasonable efforts to prevent removal and, after removal, toward reunification. Courts must make reasonable-efforts findings at each hearing. GALs assess and report on whether reasonable efforts have been made.

ORS 419B.340

Permanency Plan & Hearings

Requires a permanency plan for every child in ODHS custody, reviewed at regular permanency hearings. Plans must identify a specific permanency goal. GALs advocate regarding the permanency plan at each review and permanency hearing.

ORS 419B.600 et seq. (ORICWA)

Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act

Oregon's state-level ICWA extends tribal child welfare protections beyond federal ICWA. ORICWA applies to children affiliated with Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes and imposes active efforts requirements, tribal notice obligations, and placement preferences.

ORS 419B.502–419B.524

Termination of Parental Rights

Sets forth TPR grounds in Oregon. Clear and convincing evidence required; for ICWA/ORICWA cases, the standard is proof beyond a reasonable doubt of serious emotional or physical damage to the child.

3. Your Role as GAL

An Oregon GAL serves as the court's independent investigator and advocate for the child's best interests — gathering information from all available sources, presenting findings, and advocating for what the GAL independently determines is in the child's best interests.

■ INVESTIGATE	■ ADVOCATE	■ CONNECT	■ REPORT
Review ODHS records, school records, medical records, and other relevant information.	Present findings and recommendations to the court.	Coordinate with other professionals involved in the case.	File reports and recommendations with the court.

Oregon-Specific: ORICWA Extends Beyond Federal ICWA

Oregon's ORICWA (ORS 419B.600 et seq.) provides a second layer of tribal protections. ORICWA may cover children who are not eligible for federal ICWA — for example, a child eligible for tribal membership but whose parent is not yet enrolled. Inquire about tribal affiliations under both federal ICWA and ORICWA standards in every case.

4. The Dependency Court Process

1 Removal & Emergency Placement

ODHS or law enforcement takes child into protective custody. Must file petition within 24 hours (or next business day). Child placed in foster, kinship, or emergency shelter.

2 Shelter Hearing

Within 24 hours (or next court day). Court determines if continued protective custody is necessary. ICWA/ORICWA inquiry must be initiated at this first hearing and placed on the record.

3 GAL Appointment

Court appoints CASA volunteer as GAL under ORS 419B.231. Begin reviewing petition, ODHS records, and ICWA/ORICWA inquiry status immediately.

4 Jurisdictional Hearing

Within 60 days of petition filing. Court determines whether the child is within court jurisdiction (abuse, neglect, or without proper parental care).

5 Dispositional Hearing

Court enters order establishing case plan, placement, and required services. Advocate for ICWA/ORICWA-compliant placement and active efforts.

6 Citizen Review Board

Every 6 months. Oregon CRBs are community volunteer boards that review cases and submit recommendations to the court. GALs participate in CRB reviews.

7 Permanency Hearing

Within 12 months of removal. GAL advocates for best permanency plan including ICWA/ORICWA-compatible permanency options for tribal children.

8 TPR & Post-Permanency

If reunification ruled out, ODHS petitions for TPR under ORS 419B.502. For ICWA/ORICWA cases, BRD standard applies. GAL continues through adoption or guardianship.

5. ICWA & ORICWA in Oregon

Oregon GALs operate under TWO layers of tribal child welfare law: federal ICWA (25 U.S.C. §§ 1901–1963) and Oregon's own Indian Child Welfare Act (ORS 419B.600 et seq.). Both impose mandatory inquiry, tribal notice, placement preference, and active efforts requirements.

Oregon's 9 Federally Recognized Tribes

Burns Paiute Tribe; Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians; Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde; Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians; Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation; Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; Coquille Indian Tribe; Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians; Klamath Tribes. All nine are active participants in Oregon dependency proceedings.

Mandatory ICWA / ORICWA Inquiry Steps:

- ✓ Ask both biological parents and any extended family members about Native American or Alaska Native ancestry at initial contact
- ✓ ICWA and ORICWA inquiry must appear on the record at the shelter hearing — raise it if not documented
- ✓ If tribal affiliation is indicated, notify ODHS immediately — tribal notice must be sent within 24 hours under ORICWA
- ✓ The tribe — not the family, ODHS, or the GAL — determines ICWA/ORICWA eligibility
- ✓ ORICWA placement preferences align with ICWA § 1915 — tribal placement preference is primary unless 'good cause' exists to deviate
- ✓ 'Active efforts' (higher standard than reasonable efforts) are required before removing an Indian child and throughout the case
- ✓ ORICWA may apply to children eligible for tribal membership even if the parent is not yet enrolled — do not assume ICWA does not apply

6. Hearing Types & GAL Responsibilities

Hearing	Timing	GAL Focus
Shelter Hearing	Within 24 hrs	Confirm appointment; safety assessment; ICWA/ORICWA inquiry on record
Jurisdictional Hearing	Within 60 days	Present evidence; advocate for placement; raise ICWA/ORICWA compliance
Dispositional Hearing	After jurisdiction	Services, placement, case plan; ICWA/ORICWA active efforts and placement
Citizen Review Board	Every 6 months	Present GAL perspective; submit recommendations for CRB report to court
Judicial Review	Per court schedule	File report; assess reasonable/active efforts; review case plan compliance
Permanency Hearing	Within 12 months	Advocate for best permanency plan; ICWA/ORICWA-compatible permanency
TPR Hearing	Per ODHS petition	Support/oppose TPR; verify BRD standard for ICWA/ORICWA cases

7. Education Rights of Foster Youth

Education stability is a critical advocacy area for Oregon GALs. Foster children experience school changes at high rates, lose credits, and are disproportionately suspended. Oregon has implemented ESSA foster care provisions and has state-specific education stability laws.

- ✓ Obtain school records and report card at every case review — educational regression signals broader instability
- ✓ Ask whether the child has an active IEP or 504 Plan — IDEA rights follow the child through placement changes
- ✓ Every Oregon school district must have a Foster Care Liaison — contact directly for school of origin or enrollment disputes
- ✓ For Native students, ask about tribal cultural programming and tribal language immersion school participation (ORICWA protective factor)
- ✓ Oregon's Dept. of Education maintains a foster care education webpage with district Foster Care Liaison contacts
- ✓ GALs may consent to educational decisions when no parent or caregiver has educational rights — confirm authority in court order

Extended Foster Care: ORS 419B.476 allows youth to remain in care ages 18–21 if completing high school/GED, enrolled in post-secondary education or vocational training, or employed 80+ hours/month. Actively advocate for EFC enrollment for youth approaching age 18.

8. Key Tribal Resources

Tribe / Organization	Location	Contact
Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde ICWA	Grand Ronde, OR	(800) 422-0232
Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians ICWA	Siletz, OR	(541) 444-2532
Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs ICWA	Warm Springs, OR	(541) 553-3238
Confederated Tribes of Umatilla ICWA	Pendleton, OR	(541) 276-3165
Oregon DHS Tribal Relations Unit	Salem, OR	(503) 945-5944
NICWA (HQ in Portland)	Portland, OR	www.nicwa.org (503) 222-4044

9. Local & Statewide Resources (Portland Metro)

Organization	Phone	Web/Notes
CASA for Children of Multnomah County	(503) 988-5115	multco.us/casa — Oregon's largest CASA program
Morrison Child & Family Services	(503) 258-4264	morrisonkids.org — Trauma-informed behavioral health for child welfare
Native American Youth & Family Ctr (NAYA)	(503) 288-8177	nayapdx.org — Urban Native youth services, ICWA advocacy
Lines for Life (Crisis)	(800) 273-8255	linesforlife.org — Crisis line; Youth line: (877) 968-8491
Outside In (Youth Services)	(503) 223-4121	outsidein.org — Homeless/at-risk youth ages 13-25 in Portland
IRCO (Immigrant & Refugee)	(503) 234-1541	irco.org — Services for multicultural families in child welfare
Legal Aid Services of Oregon	(503) 224-4086	legalaidservices.org — Free civil legal help for low-income Oregonians
Oregon ODHS Child Welfare	(503) 945-5600	oregon.gov/dhs/children — State child welfare agency

Oregon CASA Network	(503) 362-5060	oregoncasanetwork.org — Statewide CASA membership organization
Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare	(503) 963-7000	cascadiabhc.org — One of Oregon's largest CMHCs — Multnomah County
211info Oregon	Dial 2-1-1	211info.org — 24/7 referral for housing, food, utilities, healthcare
Oregon Food Bank	(503) 282-0555	oregonfoodbank.org — Statewide food distribution network

10. Courtroom Practice

Before the Hearing:

- ✓ File written report and serve all parties at least 5 business days before the hearing (check Multnomah County local rules)
- ✓ Review the prior order and identify compliance issues, unmet services, or ICWA/ORICWA matters to raise
- ✓ If ICWA/ORICWA applies, confirm tribal notice was sent and whether the tribe will appear
- ✓ Prepare the child in an age-appropriate way for what will happen at the hearing

During the Hearing:

- ✓ Address the judge as 'Your Honor'; present concisely with specific, actionable recommendations
- ✓ Raise ICWA/ORICWA compliance issues directly if not adequately addressed by ODHS or the court
- ✓ Coordinate with tribal representatives — they are allies in advocating for a tribal child's well-being
- ✓ Request specific court orders: 'order ODHS to arrange trauma therapy within 21 days' not vague direction

After the Hearing:

- ✓ Obtain the court order and verify your requested orders are correctly reflected
 - ✓ Notify the child and foster caregiver of what was ordered and next steps
 - ✓ For ICWA/ORICWA cases, send a copy of the court order to the tribe's ICWA worker
 - ✓ Calendar next contact with child — active, ongoing engagement is expected throughout the case
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11. Trauma-Informed Practice

Understanding Trauma Responses: Behaviors like aggression, withdrawal, or hypervigilance are often trauma responses. Ask 'what happened to them?' not 'what is wrong with them?' — foundational to Oregon's Child Welfare Reform framework.

Age-Appropriate Communication: Adjust language and interview style to the child's developmental stage. Adolescents need privacy, honesty, and respect for their autonomy. Never promise outcomes you cannot control.

Cultural Humility for Native Youth: Connection to tribal identity and culture is a legal right under ORICWA. Advocate actively for ORICWA-compliant placements, tribal cultural programming, and contact with tribal

community. Consult the tribe's ICWA worker on cultural practices.

Sibling Connections: Sibling separation compounds the harm of removal. Advocate for sibling placement together under Oregon's statutory sibling placement preference (ORS 419B.192). Advocate for sibling visits when separate placement is unavoidable.

Supporting Attachment and Stability: Secure attachment to at least one stable adult is the strongest resilience factor. Kinship placements are often attachment-protective. Placement stability also supports educational continuity — advocate against unnecessary moves.

Secondary Trauma Awareness: GAL volunteers are at risk for vicarious traumatization. Oregon CASA programs offer debriefing and peer support. Recognize the signs: intrusive thoughts, emotional numbing, burnout. Attend to your own well-being to sustain long-term advocacy.

12. Court Report Writing Guide

Oregon circuit court judges expect fact-based, concise reports with specific, actionable recommendations. For ICWA/ORICWA cases, the report must address tribal inquiry, active efforts, tribal contacts, and ORICWA-compliant placement options.

1. Case Identification	Child's name/initials, case number, court, hearing date, GAL contact. Note ORS 419A.255 confidentiality restrictions where applicable.
2. Sources Reviewed	All documents reviewed and people interviewed including tribal ICWA worker if applicable. Demonstrates thorough independent investigation.
3. ICWA / ORICWA Status	Document inquiry result and whether ICWA/ORICWA applies. If applicable: tribe identity, tribal notice under ORS 419B.636, tribe's response, ORICWA placement preferences considered, active efforts by ODHS. Mandatory for all ICWA/ORICWA cases.
4. Current Placement & Well-Being	Describe placement, child's adjustment, physical health, emotional state, school performance. For tribal children, include cultural connections and tribal community contact.
5. Services Status	Identify each case plan service and whether accessed. Flag ordered services not yet provided. For ICWA/ORICWA cases, assess active efforts standard specifically.
6. Parental Progress	Objective description of case plan compliance. Visitation frequency and quality. Barriers to service access. Facts for findings — not characterizations.
7. Child's Views	What the child told you — in their own words. Distinguish statement from interpretation. For older youth, include views on permanency and tribal identity.

8. Best-Interest Recommendation

Clear, specific recommendation with requested court orders. For ICWA/ORICWA cases, address ORICWA compliance. Consult supervisor before filing independent motions.

Disclaimer

This handbook is a reference resource only and does not constitute legal advice. Laws, program structures, agency contacts, and tribal policies change frequently. Always verify current information with your supervising CASA staff, attorney advocate, or the relevant agency before relying on it in any legal proceeding. Oregon GAL volunteers are officers of the court and should follow their program's official guidance at all times.