

Event Date: **April 14, 2009**

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Hundreds of Abused Children Stand at Texas Capitol During Child Abuse Prevention Month



The foster children who will line the Capitol steps April 14 are life-size cutout photographs, but their message is painfully real. At this first of its kind rally, a former foster child, Chadwick Sapenter, will explain what growing up was like for him and honor the one volunteer who helped him make it through.

Every single week in Texas, an average of 275 children enter foster care. Governor Perry has proclaimed April 14 Texas CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Day.

Who: When Chadwick Sapenter was 7 years old, his father died addicted to heroin. Chadwick's mother battled mental health problems, so his brothers and he went to foster care. Chadwick will tell the crowd of CASA volunteers how his CASA helped him not only survive, but become a real estate entrepreneur and an author.

Justice Harriet O'Neill of the Texas Supreme Court will describe what judges face on the front lines in the fight against child abuse.

Joe Gagen, executive director of Texas CASA, will share the latest numbers of child abuse cases across Texas.

What: The Stand Up for Abused and Neglected Children display debuted on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and is being brought to the state Capitol by Texas CASA. Since Texas' foster children cannot be there to talk about what their lives are like, cardboard cutouts will be there with signs showing foster children's own words like:

- "Foster children should be seen and heard."
- "8 Foster Homes"
- "We all have the highest potential."

When/Where

Tuesday, April 14, 2009

10:30 a.m.

South Steps of the Capitol (corner of Congress Ave. and 11th Street)

Why: April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and 2009 statistics could be worse than years past because the number of child abuse cases traditionally goes up in rough economic times.

In 2008, 14,295 children were removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect.

Source: DFPS (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services)

Child abuse killed 223 Texas children in 2007 and 213 children in 2008.

Source: DFPS

There are 5,259 CASA volunteers who serve abused and neglected children in Texas. They get to know the foster child and talk to everyone in that child's life—from doctors to parents to teachers. Then the volunteer recommends to the judge how best to find the child a safe, permanent home.

Of the 44,928 children in state custody in 2008, fewer than half (20,451) had a CASA volunteer to stand up for them in court.

One sure way to make a difference is to become a CASA volunteer. www.becomeacasa.org