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## Early Learning & Human Services Committee

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### HB 1617

**Brief Description:** Concerning child welfare volunteer guardian ad litem program requirements.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Ortiz-Self, Farrell and Riccelli.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires guardian ad litem programs to limit the caseload of volunteer guardian ad litem coordinators so they supervise no more than 30 volunteer guardian ad litem.
- Requires guardian ad litem programs to provide additional training to volunteer guardian ad litem coordinators.

**Hearing Date:** 2/10/17

**Staff:** Luke Wickham (786-7146).

#### Background:

A guardian ad litem (GAL) is a person appointed in a court proceeding to represent the best interests of a party and to investigate and report to the court on relevant matters. In the context of a child dependency proceeding, the court must appoint a GAL to represent the best interests of the child who is the subject of the dependency. A GAL is authorized to investigate, present evidence at court hearings, submit factual reports, and make recommendations to the court regarding the child's situation and the best interests of the child.

Many GALs appointed in dependency proceedings are volunteers that work through a court established GAL program or a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) program. When a CASA or volunteer GAL is requested on a case, the court appoints the person recommended by the CASA or GAL program. If a court does not have a GAL program with a sufficient number of volunteers, the court may appoint a suitable person who may be compensated for his or her services. Compensated GALs must be appointed based on a rotational registry system, unless

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the court finds there are extraordinary circumstances, or if a joint recommendation of a GAL is made by the parties.

Each GAL volunteer must complete 30 hours of pre-service training and 12 hours of annual continuing education training.

**Summary of Bill:**

Volunteer guardian litem programs are required to ensure that volunteer guardian ad litem coordinators supervise no more than 30 volunteer guardian ad litem. Guardian ad litem programs are also required to provide additional training to volunteer guardian ad litem coordinators to include the appropriate screening of volunteer guardian ad litem reports before those reports are submitted to the court to ensure that those reports are based on objective information within the expertise of the volunteer guardian ad litem.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 31, 2017.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.