



Ohio Revised Code Section 2151.281 Guardian ad litem.

Effective: January 1, 2025

Legislation: House Bill 33

(A) The court shall appoint a guardian ad litem, subject to rules adopted by the supreme court, to protect the interest of a child in any proceeding concerning an alleged or adjudicated delinquent child or unruly child when either of the following applies:

(1) The child has no parent, guardian, or legal custodian.

(2) The court finds that there is a conflict of interest between the child and the child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian.

(B)(1) Except as provided in division (K) of this section, the court shall appoint a guardian ad litem, subject to rules adopted by the supreme court, to protect the interest of a child in any proceeding concerning an alleged abused or neglected child and in any proceeding held pursuant to section 2151.414 of the Revised Code. The guardian ad litem so appointed shall not be the attorney responsible for presenting the evidence alleging that the child is an abused or neglected child and shall not be an employee of any party in the proceeding.

(2) Except in any proceeding concerning a dependent child involving the permanent custody of an infant under the age of six months for the sole purpose of placement for adoption by a private child placing agency, the court shall appoint a guardian ad litem, subject to rules adopted by the supreme court, to protect the interest of a child in any proceeding concerning an alleged dependent child if any of the following applies:

(a) The parent of the child appears to be mentally incompetent or is under eighteen years of age.

(b) There is a conflict of interest between the child and the child's parents, guardian, or custodian.

(c) The court believes that the parent of the child is not capable of representing the best interest of the child.



(3) Except in any proceeding concerning a dependent child involving the permanent custody of an infant under the age of six months for the sole purpose of placement for adoption by a private child placing agency, the court may appoint a guardian ad litem, subject to rules adopted by the supreme court, to protect the interest of the child in any other proceeding concerning an alleged dependent child.

(4) The guardian ad litem appointed for an alleged or adjudicated abused or neglected child may bring a civil action against any person who is required by division (A)(1) or (4) of section 2151.421 of the Revised Code to file a report of child abuse or child neglect that is known or reasonably suspected or believed to have occurred if that person knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect or believe based on facts that would cause a reasonable person in a similar position to suspect or believe, as applicable, that the child for whom the guardian ad litem is appointed is the subject of child abuse or child neglect and does not file the required report and if the child suffers any injury or harm as a result of the child abuse or child neglect that is known or reasonably suspected or believed to have occurred or suffers additional injury or harm after the failure to file the report.

(C) In any proceeding concerning an alleged or adjudicated delinquent, unruly, abused, neglected, or dependent child in which the parent appears to be mentally incompetent or is under eighteen years of age, the court shall appoint a guardian ad litem to protect the interest of that parent.

(D) The court shall require the guardian ad litem to faithfully discharge the guardian ad litem's duties and, upon the guardian ad litem's failure to faithfully discharge the guardian ad litem's duties, shall discharge the guardian ad litem and appoint another guardian ad litem. The court may fix the compensation for the service of the guardian ad litem, which compensation shall be paid from the treasury of the county, subject to rules adopted by the supreme court.

(E) A parent who is eighteen years of age or older and not mentally incompetent shall be deemed sui juris for the purpose of any proceeding relative to a child of the parent who is alleged or adjudicated to be an abused, neglected, or dependent child.

(F) In any case in which a parent of a child alleged or adjudicated to be an abused, neglected, or dependent child is under eighteen years of age, the parents of that parent shall be summoned to



appear at any hearing respecting the child, who is alleged or adjudicated to be an abused, neglected, or dependent child.

(G) Except as provided in division (K) of this section, in any case in which a guardian ad litem is to be appointed for an alleged or adjudicated abused, neglected, or dependent child or in any case involving an agreement for the voluntary surrender of temporary or permanent custody of a child that is made in accordance with section 5103.15 of the Revised Code, the court shall appoint the guardian ad litem in each case as soon as possible after the complaint is filed, the request for an extension of the temporary custody agreement is filed with the court, or the request for court approval of the permanent custody agreement is filed. The guardian ad litem or the guardian ad litem's replacement shall continue to serve until any of the following occur:

- (1) The complaint is dismissed or the request for an extension of a temporary custody agreement or for court approval of the permanent custody agreement is withdrawn or denied;
- (2) All dispositional orders relative to the child have terminated;
- (3) The legal custody of the child is granted to a relative of the child, or to another person;
- (4) The child is placed in an adoptive home or, at the court's discretion, a final decree of adoption is issued with respect to the child;
- (5) The child reaches the age of eighteen if the child does not have a developmental disability or physical impairment or the child reaches the age of twenty-one if the child has a developmental disability or physical impairment;
- (6) The guardian ad litem resigns or is removed by the court and a replacement is appointed by the court.

If a guardian ad litem ceases to serve a child pursuant to division (G)(4) of this section and the petition for adoption with respect to the child is denied or withdrawn prior to the issuance of a final decree of adoption or prior to the date an interlocutory order of adoption becomes final, the juvenile court shall reappoint a guardian ad litem for that child. The public children services agency or private



child placing agency with permanent custody of the child shall notify the juvenile court if the petition for adoption is denied or withdrawn.

(H) If the guardian ad litem for an alleged or adjudicated abused, neglected, or dependent child is an attorney admitted to the practice of law in this state, the guardian ad litem also may serve as counsel to the ward. Until the supreme court adopts rules regarding service as a guardian ad litem that regulate conflicts between a person's role as guardian ad litem and as counsel, if a person is serving as guardian ad litem and counsel for a child and either that person or the court finds that a conflict may exist between the person's roles as guardian ad litem and as counsel, the court shall relieve the person of duties as guardian ad litem and appoint someone else as guardian ad litem for the child. If the court appoints a person who is not an attorney admitted to the practice of law in this state to be a guardian ad litem, the court also may appoint an attorney admitted to the practice of law in this state to serve as counsel for the guardian ad litem.

(I) The guardian ad litem for an alleged or adjudicated abused, neglected, or dependent child shall perform whatever functions are necessary to protect the best interest of the child, including, but not limited to, investigation, mediation, monitoring court proceedings, and monitoring the services provided the child by the public children services agency or private child placing agency that has temporary or permanent custody of the child, and shall file any motions and other court papers that are in the best interest of the child in accordance with rules adopted by the supreme court.

The guardian ad litem shall be given notice of all hearings, administrative reviews, and other proceedings in the same manner as notice is given to parties to the action.

(J)(1) When the court appoints a guardian ad litem pursuant to this section, it shall appoint a qualified volunteer or court appointed special advocate whenever one is available and the appointment is appropriate.

(2) Upon request, the department of children and youth shall provide for the training of volunteer guardians ad litem.

(K) A guardian ad litem shall not be appointed for a child who is under six months of age in any proceeding in which a private child placing agency is seeking permanent custody of the child or



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seeking approval of a voluntary permanent custody surrender agreement for the sole purpose of the adoption of the child.