

SENATE BILL 544

By White

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 36  
and Title 37, relative to the department of  
children's services.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 37, Chapter 5, Part 1, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

(a) The department of children's services shall employ a guardian ad litem, who is qualified under Supreme Court Rule 40, within each region of the state. Each guardian ad litem employed pursuant to this section must have experience in termination of parental rights cases and be trained by the department in termination of parental rights.

(b) A guardian ad litem employed by the department shall advocate for each child who is in the custody of the department due to allegations of dependency and neglect and located within the region that the guardian ad litem serves.

(c) When a child has been in the custody of the department due to allegations of dependency and neglect for at least six (6) months, then the guardian ad litem for the region in which the child is located shall review the child's case to determine whether to file a petition to terminate the parental rights of the child's parent or guardian, pursuant to § 36-1-113(b)(1). If the guardian ad litem determines that termination is appropriate, then the guardian ad litem shall file a petition within thirty (30) days to terminate the parental rights of the child's parent or guardian.

SECTION 2. This act takes effect January 1, 2024, the public welfare requiring it.