



Testimony for the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services

Wednesday, February 2, 2022

Submitted by Kimberly George, President and CEO, Project Guardianship

Thank you, Chair Krueger and Chair Weinstein for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony today. I am Kimberly George, President and CEO for Project Guardianship.

Project Guardianship was founded in 2005 as a social justice initiative of the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera). In partnership with the New York State Office of Court Administration (OCA), Vera launched a pilot program called The Guardianship Project to fill a gap in the guardianship and elder services safety net for New Yorkers. In 2020, The Guardianship Project became Project Guardianship, Inc., an independent organization. Today, we offer the most comprehensive model of legal guardianship available — serving clients regardless of their ability to pay —and provide services for the court’s most complex cases in New York City. We also share research and recommendations for a better guardianship system and advocate for a more equitable response to providing services for people in need of protective arrangements.

New York’s aging population is growing rapidly. Across the state more than 3.2 million New Yorkers are over the age of 65, and by 2030, nearly one in four New Yorkers will be an older adult. One-third of older adults identify as Black, Latinx, Asian or non-white, and the number of older immigrants statewide is growing at nearly double the rate of U.S.-born older adults. At the same time, nearly 1 in 7 older New Yorkers is living in poverty. Older, lower income adults are at the center of the housing affordability and homelessness crises, especially older adults of color. These older, vulnerable adults are disproportionately impacted by abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.

Despite increased state and federal investments directed towards care for aging and disabled New Yorkers, far too many will be denied the opportunity to benefit from these programs because they are physically or cognitively unable to navigate our complex social service network. This is where legal guardianship often steps in. Nonprofit guardianship programs work to secure the public benefits, housing, healthcare, and other supports that this population needs to improve outcomes and promote safety and stability. Their clients include older New Yorkers, those living with serious disability, physical impairments, mental health issues, dementia, substance abuse, Traumatic Brain Injury, and other conditions that negatively impact their ability to make decisions. These programs have demonstrated how a good guardian can prevent institutionalization and support these populations right in their own communities. Not only do these efforts support the local economy by redirecting this funding back into the community, guardianship also saves public dollars by decreasing Medicaid spending.



At a time of increased awareness of the challenges facing older and disabled New Yorkers and a commitment to enacting a Master Plan for Aging in our state, more robust funding for non-profit guardianship services is critical. As Governor Hochul alluded to in her State of the State address earlier this month, her administration is committed to improving nursing home care, strengthening affordable housing for older adults, and combating isolation and abuse. It is critical to note that achieving these goals is often contingent on a good guardian who can facilitate access to critical services and supports. As our State recovers from the Coronavirus pandemic and looks to rebuild for the long term, supporting our most vulnerable should be at the top of the priority list in our state budget. Community-based guardianship programs should be robustly funded to ensure that those in most need are able to access the programs and services available to them.

Please reach out to Kimberly George at kgeorge@nycourts.gov with any questions or requests for additional information.