

Testimony Prepared for the  
**House Appropriations – Government Operations Committee**  
March 7, 2023  
By Audrey Uhrich, Guardian Angels, vice president GAND

## **RE: Senate Bill 2015 – OMB Budget/Public Guardianship Funding**

Chairman Monson and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity. I am Audrey Uhrich, vice president of the Guardianship Association of ND and professional guardian on staff at Guardian Angels. I've been working as a guardian for almost 17 years.

In that time, much has changed for guardians in our state –

- State requirements include backgrounds checks, state court on-line training and national certification for professional guardians or accreditation for the programs.
- Individuals needing guardians come with more complicated issues including chronic mental health, addictions, brain injuries, criminal histories, and complex family issues.

Some things haven't changed –

- North Dakota still needs more guardians to meet the guardianship need of vulnerable adults. The lack of guardians is simply due to the PASS program being underfunded.
- The responsibilities of guardians haven't changed. When serving the most vulnerable individuals who are unable to make decisions for themselves, we will:
  - Address their care, medical, and housing needs, review finances, and apply for appropriate benefits – SSDI, SNAP, M/A, etc.
  - Attend medical appointments, care conferences, consult with medical providers, make important medical decisions and be available 24/7.

It's important, challenging work and much of it happens outside of the regular work week.

- Last week I was called at 6 am on Saturday morning and notified of the death of one of our individuals. That morning I made multiple calls - notifying the family contact person and the funeral home to communicate all necessary information.
- Early in February I was called at 7 pm on a weeknight from the doctor of one of our individuals. She updated me on a change in his condition regarding his cancer diagnosis. We discussed at length the treatment options available for him.

As guardians, we know the value of our work for the state of North Dakota. Realistically, the \$6.1 million approved by the Senate won't allow for the increase in staffing needed.

I respectfully ask you to support a funding increase to \$8.1 million. Thank you for your consideration.