

Testimony Prepared for the

Senate Appropriations – Government Operations Committee

January 20, 2023

By Audrey Uhrich, Guardian Angels, vice president GAND

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

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I am Audrey Uhrich, vice president of the Guardian Association of ND and professional guardian on staff at Guardian Angels.

Public (professional) guardians are court appointed to serve vulnerable adults who:

- Have no family OR
- Family is not appropriate to serve due to their own health issues; case too complex for family members; or family members may have exploited the vulnerable person.

Once appointed a guardian can:

- Review an individual's finances, apply for appropriate benefits – SSDI, SNAP, M/A, etc.
- Address the care, medical, and housing needs of the individual. Monitor all services being received to ensure needs are being met and make changes as their condition changes.
- Attend medical appointments, care conferences, consult with medical providers, and make important medical decisions as needed.
- Be available 24/7 for all emergent needs.

Without public guardians, vulnerable adults without legal decision makers:

- May stay home in unsafe situations because they are unwilling to accept services.
- Often use the Emergency Room, to manage their health instead of following up with their provider.
- Are hospitalized longer as there is no legal decision maker to authorize a safe placement.
- May end up in nursing homes sooner because of inconsistent self-care, inadequate medical follow-up, or noncompliance with prescriptions.

At this time, there are not enough public/professional guardians due to insufficient funding for the PASS Program. Vulnerable adults may be unsafe, being financially exploited and remain in terrible situations because they have no decision maker to advocate for them, stop exploitation, and find a safe setting for them.

Guardians are an essential piece in the continuum of care for vulnerable adults in our state. We're asking for support to increase funding in the OMB budget for the PASS program.