

**Senate Human Services
Sen. Judy Lee, Chair
Jan. 4, 2023
SB 2035**

Chairperson Lee and members of the committee. My name is Kristin Vetter and I am the Sanford Health Bismarck Director for Case Management. Thank you for the opportunity to share comments with you on this important topic and to encourage a yes vote on SB 2035.

In my role I oversee our patient discharge process, ensuring that our patients are sent home safely or transferred to another level of care needed by the patient. We work closely with the patient and their family members to ensure smooth transitions of care.

When a patient who is unable to make decisions for themselves and does not have anyone qualified to make decisions for them, that patient unfortunately is left stranded in a hospital bed long after they are ready to move on. In a perfect world, the process of assigning a vulnerable individual the guardianship services they need would take a few days to a week. Currently, the process takes several weeks at best and sometimes much longer.

Certainly there are many factors that contribute to discharge delays, but establishing guardianship services for patients seemingly guarantees a patient will remain in a hospital bed much longer than medically necessary.

These situations present many challenges for the patient and the hospital. When the patient is ready for discharge, but awaiting guardianship services, the bed is not available for another patient with acute medical needs. While the patient remains in limbo, there is no one to instruct the hospital in care decisions.

As an example, an adult male admitted this year required a short hospitalization but ended up staying 79 days waiting for guardianship services and, ultimately, placement into a memory care facility. This stay occurred at a time when hospital beds were frequently full. With an average 4.2-day inpatient length of stay, that hospital bed could have provided care for 18 patients while this gentleman was stuck through no fault of his own. The delayed transfer is not good patient care and it's not good for the patients who were denied a hospital admission at Sanford because that bed was filled for more than 10 weeks with an individual that did not have medical necessity.

There is no blame to be placed, only the recognition that we need to do better for these patients. Establishing guardianship is a complex challenge, complicated further by financial shortfalls. The additional funding for guardianships included in SB 2035 is a step in the right direction.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

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