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**To:** House Appropriations – Government Operations Division Committee  
**From:** Shannon Henrickson, Director of Guardianship Services for the Vulnerable with Catholic Charities North Dakota (CCND)  
**Date:** Jan 16, 2025  
**Re:** House Bill 1015 - Office of Management and Budget- Guardianship

Chairman Monson and members of the Government Operations Division Committee, my name is Shannon Henrickson, and I am the Director of Guardianship Services for the Vulnerable with Catholic Charities North Dakota (CCND) and a member of the Guardianship Association of North Dakota (GAND).

I would like to take this opportunity to explain what it looks like to be a provider of guardian/conservator services in North Dakota. As a group we are trying to help the most vulnerable citizens of our state.

We are the guardians of last resort to be the decision maker supporting elderly individuals with dementia/Alzheimer's, those with persistent mental illness, traumatic brain injury, cognitively impaired, severe medical conditions, chemical dependency, homelessness or other related vulnerabilities. At CCND, we began serving 28 individuals in 2020 and are now serving 118 individuals in our program, 107 that are on Public Administrator Support Services (PASS) funding. We have an additional 17 individuals that are currently in some stage of the guardianship petitioning process. When all of these individuals are on board, we will have more than quadrupled our capacity. We currently have ten (10.5) staff members on our team: Seven (7) guardianship workers/Assistant GSV Director, two (2.5) financial support worker and (1) myself. The guardianship workers must have a minimum of a 4-year degree in a human service-related field. CCND is Counsel on Accreditation (COA) licensed as an agency. I currently serve on the North Dakota Guardianship Referral Coalition and there are 52 names on the waiting list (that are mostly difficult cases). To assist these individuals, we need to hire more guardians. With our funding at the end of the fiscal year June 30, 2024, our CCND budget ended with \$133,379 in deficit spending, leaving us to raise funds and apply for grants to cover the shortfall. Operating costs have increased 10%, wages are up 16% and Insurance are up 10% since the last biennium. We are asking to increase the funding for PASS to \$ 9.1 million for the next biennium.

Providing these much-needed services is no small feat. This is a hard job requiring much dedication and caring to determine what is needed for each of the individuals. In serving individuals with severe and persistent mental health issues, we find that they are losing their place of residence, not complying with medications, not able to find a support team due to lack of a workforce, lack of services and/or refusing to allow providers in to support their needs.

In the area of the elderly, we are trying to discover their protected assets, find the income(s) they are entitled to, determine if friends or family have taken advantage of them and if financial exploitation has occurred. We also have to sell/manage assets such as bank accounts, vehicles, houses, land, mineral rights, efficiently and effectively to meet their long-term care needs and to maintain the individual in the community while keeping them safe and healthy for as long as possible. We focus on the least restrictive most person-centered care possible to reduce the cost of long-term care spending.

Additionally, we may have to complete the following applications for Medicare, Medical Assistance, apply to be representative payee with social security, determine if they have some other types of income, such as pensions, veterans benefits, retirement accounts, IRA's etc., set up bank accounts, determine bills to be paid and open mail and pay expenses for 118 individuals; complete applications for housing, community based services, adult foster care, basic care, skilled nursing home care or memory care depending on the individual's needs, provide transportation, take them shopping, pick up medications, take them and sit at medical appointments. In addition, we are accountable to the court and must complete yearly well-being and financial court reports as well.

Getting all of this done on a timely basis depends on the person you encounter on the other end of each of the scenarios. At CCND, we encountered 8,768 other contacts to talk about guardian/conservator questions or concerns on behalf of clients. There can be a gap in education for providers of service, community industries such as banks, utility companies, phone vendors, clothing stores, grocery stores etc. Many do not understand the power of court ordered guardianships and will make statements such as, do you have POA, do you know the PIN for the account, the court papers you have are not good enough, we need a state issued ID, or birth certificate etc.

With all this work to be completed, CCND is compensated just \$18/day for each case, which over a 30 day month equals only \$540/month compensation per case through the PASS program. Agencies must also cover the cost of mileage for their staff. If truth be told, on average, a guardianship worker spends at a minimum of 6-7 hours a month on a case and financial support staff spend 1.5 hour per month per case. Guardians can travel over 100(+) miles one way to visit a client. We, at CCND, made 1,379 client visits and 247 team meetings and made 1514 phone calls, 127 emergencies on call supports on behalf of 118 clients this past year, traveling 35,108 miles in 21 counties.

In closing, just remember day in and day out we deal with the most difficult of guardianship cases. The ones no one else will take. Each of these cases take time, dedication, expertise, human resources, and funding to support these vulnerable individuals in need.