

Interim Human Services Committee
August 30, 2012
Testimony regarding Public Guardianship Structure
By Kristen Hasbargen, Director – Richland County Social Services

Chairman Wieland, members of the committee, my name is Kristen Hasbargen, Director of Richland County Social Services and chair of the Region Five Adult Protection Funding Committee. This is a group of local service providers who serve the aging and those with disabilities. Our group's mission is to secure sufficient funding for long-term adult protective services; this includes adequate, knowledgeable staff in each region of North Dakota.

As heard from Representative Hogan's testimony, establishment of guardianships and Adult Protective Services are intertwined. The need for Adult Protection Services is an essential element in the guardianship process and largely unknown to the general public. Unlike many other social conditions such as addiction, pervasive mental illness and delinquency that can cause significant distress to the general public, abused adults are often hidden behind closed doors and concealed from public view. North Dakota has a burgeoning aging population, as well as escalating concerns in the oil-impacted counties regarding financial exploitation. The National Center on Elder Abuse estimates the frequency of elder abuse ranges from 2-10% of the population. In a recent state-wide survey, 65% of counties report an increase in adult protective referrals. Coverage for APS services state-wide is inadequate to meet the demand and assess these referrals in a timely manner. These concerns have also been voiced by other providers including long-term care professionals, law enforcement, emergency personnel, housing authority and healthcare.

Our group's request is that this committee will recommend the development of a bill draft to address both areas of need. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.