

Testimony Prepared for the  
**Senate Human Services Committee**

January 30, 2023

By Audrey Uhrich, Guardian Angels, vice president GAND

**RE: Senate Bill 2345 – Guardianship Monitoring / Guardianship Funding**

Chair Lee and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to present the facts concerning the crisis with guardianship in our state. 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 be decision makers for vulnerable adults who:

- Have no family OR
- Family is not appropriate to serve due to their own health issues; the case is 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 (cancer treatments, surgical decisions, hospice, etc.).
- 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.
- May use the Emergency Room, for health issues instead of following up with a provider.
- Are hospitalized longer as there is no legal decision maker to authorize a safe placement.
- May reside in nursing homes sooner because of inconsistent self-care, inadequate medical follow-up, or noncompliance with prescriptions.

Currently, there are not enough public/professional guardians due to insufficient funding. Vulnerable adults may

- be unsafe and being financially exploited.
- 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. This work is difficult, challenging, exhausting, and rewarding. We want to continue but we need financial support.

We're asking for your support to increase funding in the OMB budget and DHHS and create a task force of guardianship monitoring to ensure quality guardianship services to vulnerable adults.