



Testimony for the NYC Council 2023 Preliminary Budget Hearings
NYC Council Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction;
Jointly with the Committee on Health
Chairs Linda Lee and Lynn Schulman

March 21, 2023

Presented by Kimberly George, President and CEO, Project Guardianship

Thank you, Chairs Lee and Schulman and Committee Members, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kimberly George, and I am President and CEO of Project Guardianship. Project Guardianship was founded in 2005 as a social justice initiative of the Vera Institute of Justice, and in 2020, became an independent non-profit organization providing comprehensive, court appointed guardianship services to hundreds of limited capacity New Yorkers citywide. We serve clients regardless of their ability to pay and provide services for some of the most compelling and complex cases in the city. We also share research and recommendations for building a better guardianship system and advocate for a more equitable service response for people in need of surrogate decision-making supports or protective arrangements.

New York City's older adult population is growing dramatically and rapidly outpacing the capabilities of our long-term care sector. It's estimated that someone turning 65 today has a 70% chance of needing some form of long-term care services¹, a form of which is adult guardianship which facilitates access to necessary care. Mirroring national demographics, New York City's older adult population is also living longer and getting poorer². In fact, one in five older New Yorkers lives below the poverty level, and older adults who identify as Latino (27%) or Asian/Pacific Islander (26%) are more likely to experience poverty³. Anecdotally, 74% of our clients live below the poverty threshold, and we expect this to become more common as New Yorkers continue to battle inflation and the enduring effects of the pandemic. We have witnessed firsthand that already marginalized communities have borne the brunt of COVID's devastation. We've seen increased rates of social isolation, Alzheimer's and related dementia diagnoses, homelessness, and substance use disorder⁴, which experts have attributed to a mental health crisis gripping New York.⁵

Guardianship services have one function: to protect the health, safety, and well-being of those New Yorkers the courts have found to be incapacitated. Sometimes, guardianship is their only path towards safety

¹ <https://acl.gov/ltc/basic-needs/how-much-care-will-you-need>

² <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/episrv/2019-older-adult-health.pdf>

³ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/episrv/2019-older-adult-health.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/episrv/2019-older-adult-health.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/homelessness/2022/03/03/losing-hope-on-the-streets--a-mental-health-crisis-grips-the-city>



and stability; it can help stop abuse, prevent harm and exploitation; it can help individuals avoid unnecessary institutionalization and access the medical care they need. Countless individuals rely on the guardianship system each year to protect their health and wellbeing, but the current system is woefully underfunded and already stretched to capacity. Non-profit providers sometimes struggle to keep their doors open, are forced to turn people away, or simply stop providing services due to funding cuts. The populations they serve; people with limited capacity, debilitating health conditions or mental health disorders, are the ones to suffer.

It is therefore critical that nonprofit programs be robustly funded to ensure that every New Yorker can access the services and stability they need to thrive. A sustained investment would ensure that individuals who need a guardian are able to receive a high-quality one, for as long as necessary. Not only can mission-driven nonprofits deliver the wraparound, person-centered services that this population needs, but they also play a critical role in preventing unnecessary guardianships by proactively connecting clients with a range of social, financial, and healthcare resources. These efforts save public dollars by decreasing unnecessary Medicaid spending on avoidable hospitalizations while also stimulating local economies.

We have and will continue to fill the gaps in our social safety net and will persist in connecting our clients to the health and mental health care they need and deserve to gain stability and age with dignity. But we will need additional funding to adequately meet their needs in the most person-centered way possible. New York City must lead and create a dedicated funding stream to support guardians that provide care for individuals with disabilities, serious mental illness and complex health conditions. Further, we are requesting that the Council include funding to support nonprofit guardianship in the FY24 budget. In doing so, more of their constituents in need will be able to access the benefits and services to which they are entitled so they may thrive as they age, ideally in community. In order to avoid an impending elder care crisis, we must act now.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

Please contact Kimberly George at kgeorge@nycourts.gov with any questions or requests for additional information.