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Written Testimony of Patricia Perlow on HB 5019 to the Joint Ways and Means Committee
on March 11, 2021

Senator Lieber, Representative Nosse and members of the committee:

I am the elected District Attorney for Lane County. I submit this testimony to you today in support of HB 5019, funding of the Long Term Care Ombudsman and specifically increasing funding for expansion of the Public Guardian and Conservator Program.

I know every agency has a request for funding, or additional funding, and that hard decisions have to be made on how to allocate limited resources. Across the state, and in Lane County in particular, there is a mental health crisis that impacts every budget from public works to public health to law enforcement at every level of government. We are working so hard to keep people with mental illness out of the criminal justice system with limited success. Our appellate courts have determined a person has a right to be mentally ill, regardless of whether they can take care of themselves or make sound decisions. Mentally ill people are arrested for public order offenses (and worse) and sent to the State Hospital or a local facility for restoration to fitness to proceed in court. Oftentimes, those people are found never able to be fit, only to be released to the community without resources or support, not because we don't care, but because we have no authority to make them take advantage of the resources.

When someone with mental illness or a traumatic brain injury or other disability has an appointed guardian, they have the necessary support to stay in stable housing, and receive medical care. They no longer impact the budgets of all the other public agencies that aren't designed to help someone in those circumstances. Increased funding for the Public Guardian and Conservator Program is a comparatively modest investment considering the benefits to the people supported by the program and the communities in which they live. With this modest investment in expansion, the program can go from serving about 85 individuals to more than doubling that capacity. I urge you to support this bill.

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