



March 4, 2025

My name is Ruth Bern. I am a supervisor with Adult Protective Services in Lane County, Oregon. I have worked at Senior and Disability Services for the last 10.5 years and have spent the majority of my time working with extremely vulnerable individuals. I am writing today in support of additional funding for the Long Term Care Ombudsman, specifically the Oregon Public Guardian and Conservator program which is such a vital tool in keeping Oregonians safe.

Since 2017, my team or I have facilitated a multidisciplinary meeting called the High Risk Team (HRT) which serves to support vulnerable and dependent adults currently facing imminent threat to their health and safety. Our mission is to bring together various social service and health care agencies operating in Lane County to develop and facilitate implementation of person centered and least intrusive alternatives. This team was developed in 2015 in collaboration with the Oregon Public Guardian, as a way to streamline referrals and ensure that all least restrictive options had been attempted prior to guardianship discussion. Our team is creative, hardworking and as a result, we have had some amazing success stories in mitigating risk without the need of a surrogate decision maker. However, there are individuals in our community who will not be safe until a guardian is appointed. Individuals who do not have the funds or the social supports available to act on their behalf still deserve an advocate that ensures their voice is heard.

Many of my staff have worked in this field before the Oregon Public Guardian, struggling to find safety nets for individuals who meet the incapacitated criteria but do not have the resources to acquire private supports. Although we now have the Oregon Public Guardian's office, we work in a time where they are at or nearing capacity on a regular basis. Without an increase to the Oregon Public Guardian budget, we go back to a time where our most vulnerable adults are without the supports they need to live safe and healthy lives.

In my previous role as an abuse investigator, I have helped hundreds of clients towards harm reduction plans, supporting them to a safer future. Balancing safety with autonomy can be extremely nuanced. I understand how important self-determination is

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when making life decisions. I have worked hard to ensure the clients I work with, and now the clients my staff work with, are able to direct their care and safety plans as much as possible. However, some individuals are no longer able to make informed decisions and are at imminent risk of harm without intervention. It is not a decision that is taken lightly but when that time comes, we must be able to act promptly. In this field, our jobs are only as affective as the tools we have access to. We must provide additional funding to the OPG program to ensure those that require supports to maintain their wellbeing are not left behind.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ruth Bern

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