



**Testimony for the  
JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON THE 2025 EXECUTIVE BUDGET  
Topic: Health/Medicaid  
February 11, 2025**

**Senate Finance Committee, Chair Liz Krueger  
Assembly Ways and Means Committee, Chair J. Gary Pretlow**

**Submitted by Kimberly George, President and CEO, Project Guardianship**

Over the past decade, the number of older adults in New York City has risen by at least 32% across every borough, with Queens seeing the most rapid growth at 39.3%. Recent studies predict that a significant portion of this population will face dementia and other cognitive challenges, putting pressure on mental and physical health services, which are already stretched thin.

New York's Medicaid program provides vital health coverage to over 7.5 million residents, with 4 million living in New York City. For low-income older adults, Medicaid is essential for filling gaps left by Medicare, including services like oral health, vision, hearing, long-term care, and transportation. PG's program operates within the broader New York State Medicaid system, and in 2024, more than 80% of PG's clients were Medicaid recipients.

For nearly 20 years, Project Guardianship (PG) has been utilizing its unique, interdisciplinary model to support clients. A recent cost-benefit analysis revealed that in just half that time, PG helped save \$160 million in public funds through Medicaid savings, reduced hospitalizations, and by stabilizing clients so they could remain in their communities whenever possible.

Currently, more than 28,000 people in New York State are under guardianship. Based on the above findings, we estimate that each individual in guardianship could save the state nearly \$67,000 annually. This means that if every person in need of a guardian had access to a well-managed, person-centered program, New York State could potentially save \$1.9 billion in public funds every year.

Investing in person-centered guardianship models addresses the critical needs of a rapidly aging population while generating significant public savings. This approach emphasizes the fiscal and ethical responsibility to scale such programs to meet the growing statewide demand.

However, for those who require a guardian due to cognitive decline, but have no family support and cannot afford a private guardian, the state lacks an effective public system to fill this need.

**Project Guardianship is deeply disappointed that the Executive Budget for the State Fiscal Year 2026 does not include any funding for the essential guardianship services that so many New Yorkers rely on.**



As advocates for the rights and well-being of vulnerable individuals in need of surrogate decision-making, we recognize the critical importance of a well-funded, effective guardianship system that ensures all New Yorkers, particularly older adults and those with disabilities, receive the care and protection they deserve. While we appreciate the Governor's recognition of the state's growing aging population and the need for innovative solutions to address it, the omission of funding for guardianship services directly undermines the ability of nonprofits and community-based organizations to meet the increasing demand for qualified, person-centered care. Without proper financial support, vulnerable individuals continue to face long delays and the risk of being appointed unqualified guardians, jeopardizing their health, safety, and dignity.

Article 81 of New York's Mental Hygiene Law provides that the court, having ruled out all lesser restrictive alternatives, shall appoint a guardian to protect and promote the interests of persons with limitations that affect their ability to make decisions for themselves. However, there is no public fund to compensate guardians and judges are unable to fulfill this mandate due to a shortage of guardians. Instead, the system relies on family caregivers and the personal wealth of those in need of a guardian to pay for their own services, neither of which reflects the experience of today's older adults who are increasingly aging alone and with limited financial resources.

In some areas, nonprofits have stepped in to fill the gap, raising funds from private and public sources to serve as guardians for those with no other option. In doing so, they have demonstrated their keen ability to deliver the highest quality guardianship services for those in their care. Nonprofits are adaptable and able to handle the constant demands of the job, they reduce costs by keeping individuals out of institutional settings, they are more inclined to assist people in aging with dignity and independence, and their dedication to enrolling individuals in benefits helps strengthen local economies, among other benefits. According to a 10-year study of Project Guardianship's guardianship services, nonprofit guardians save an average of \$67,000 per client per year, mostly in Medicaid savings.

Unfortunately, the absence of a permanent, adequate funding source to fulfill the mandate of Article 81 has prevented nonprofits from meeting the demand for services at scale. Furthermore, the perennial threat of funding cuts puts nonprofit services—and, critically, those in receipt of guardianship services—at risk.

New York needs a publicly funded guardianship program.

### Call to Action

An annual \$15 million Executive Budget investment in a Statewide Initiative of Nonprofit Guardians (SING) would:

- Ensure that every New Yorker who needs a legal guardian has access to a high-quality, person-centered guardian regardless of their financial or social circumstance.



# PROJECT GUARDIANSHIP

Changing the way we care for people.

- Build the capacity of local aging services organizations across New York to serve as guardians in counties where the shortage is greatest.
- Establish a robust database with demographics and outcomes for guardianship clients.
- Create an estimated net savings of \$80 million per year in Medicaid costs by shortening hospital and nursing home stays and helping New Yorkers live and age in their homes and communities.

Unlike other proposed solutions to New York's guardianship crisis, SING is rooted in decades of practical experience and a deep understanding of what it takes to be the guardian of another person. It represents a practical and experienced approach to addressing New York's guardianship crisis.

Project Guardianship applauds Chair Senator Krueger and the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Chair Pretlow and the Committee for their commitment to finding comprehensive ways to meet needs of our state's older and disabled populations. Thank you.