Administrative Office of the Courts

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Newly formed guardianship reform group to meet next month

SANTA FE – A newly formed partnership of stakeholders to provide ongoing evaluation of New Mexico's adult guardianship system will hold its first meeting on Sept. 9.

The Supreme Court issued an order earlier this week appointing members of the Working Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS), which includes protected persons under a guardianship, a family member, a professional guardian and conservator, and representatives of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

Similar WINGS programs operate in more than two dozen states. The WINGS in New Mexico was established by a new law (House Bill 234) enacted earlier this year. The law designated a wide range of stakeholder categories to be part of the group and directed the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to appoint members representing them.

"Continued improvements in the guardianship system for vulnerable New Mexicans require a sustained collaboration by state courts and stakeholders in our communities. Our newly formed WINGS will operate as a partnership for advancing guardianship reform," said Justice C. Shannon Bacon, who is among four WINGS members representing the Judiciary.

Court-appointed guardians make personal and health care decisions for individuals who are incapacitated. Conservators are appointed by a court to manage the financial and possibly the property affairs of an incapacitated person, including those who may have dementia, traumatic brain injuries, a developmental disability or mental illness.

Under the new state law, the duties of the WINGS are to:

> "A. identify strengths and weaknesses in New Mexico's system of adult guardianship and conservatorship;
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> "B. identify the least restrictive decision-making options for alleged incapacitated persons and protected persons under guardianship and conservatorship;

"C. review national standards on guardianship and conservatorship practices and recommend standards for implementation in New Mexico;
"D. proposed methods of training guardians and conservators in best practices or adopted standards;
"E. recommend outreach, education and training as needed; and
"F. serve as an ongoing problem-solving mechanism to enhance the quality of care and quality of life for adults who are or may soon be in the guardianship or conservatorship system."

Second Judicial District Court Judge Nancy Franchini will chair the WINGS, which by law must meet at least four times a year.

The first meeting will be held virtually on the Zoom platform on Sept. 9, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. The second meeting is scheduled for Nov. 30, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Information about the WINGS and the September meeting, including how to remotely participate, will be posted on the Judiciary's webpage at a later date.

"The WINGS will build on work started by the Guardianship Steering Committee three years ago to promote the well-being of New Mexicans no longer able to manage their financial and personal affairs," said Judge Franchini, who chaired the committee.

The Supreme Court formed the steering committee after the Legislature approved guardianship system improvements in 2018.

Other members of the WINGS are: First Judicial District Court Judge Bryan Biedscheid, Twelfth Judicial District Court Judge Dan Bryant; Anastasia Martin, designee of Aging and Long-Term Services Secretary Katrina Hotrum-Lopez; Alice Liu McCoy, executive director of the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Planning Council; Bryce Pittenger, designee of the co-chief executive officers of the Interagency Behavioral Health Purchasing Collaborative; State Auditor Brian Colón; Van Snow, designee of Attorney General Hector Balderas; state Sens. Katy Duhigg and Linda Lopez, both of Albuquerque; state Reps. Joanne Ferrary of Las Cruces and Daymon Ely of Corrales; Tim Gardner, designee of the chief executive officer of Disability Rights New Mexico; Rosanna Soloperto, a professional guardian; Greg Ireland, a professor conservator; Veronica Chavez Neuman, a family guardian; Catherine Overton, a family member who is not a guardian or conservator; Margaret "Peggy" Graham, an Albuquerque attorney; Dr. Christine Burns, a health care provider in Albuquerque; Jodi Cooper and Steven Simmerson, protected persons under guardianship; Patricia Galindo, an attorney with the Administrative Office of the Courts; and DeAnza Valencia of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

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