



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

### NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 25, 2024

#### **Pennsylvania Courts Announce New Pilot Project Providing Free Legal Representation to Older Adults in Guardianship Cases**

**HARRISBURG** – The Pennsylvania Courts through its Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) today announced a new, grant-funded pilot project with MidPenn Legal Services and the Dauphin County Orphans’ Court to provide free legal representation in all guardianship cases in Dauphin County for adults aged 60 and older.

“Guardianship is sometimes necessary for persons with diminished capacity or persons with a disability in managing their affairs,” said the OEJC’s Senior Judge Paula Francisco Ott. “The appointment of counsel through this partnership is a tremendous benefit to all older Pennsylvanians, further ensuring that their concerns, wishes and rights are respected and protected at every step of the legal process.”

This initiative aims to increase the appointment of counsel for and the frequency of attendance of the alleged incapacitated person or incapacitated person at guardianship proceedings, both key factors in ensuring due process and the preservation of their rights.

Working with MidPenn Legal Services, Dauphin County’s Orphans’ Court, under the leadership of Judge John McNally, will appoint counsel for all alleged incapacitated persons aged 60 and older unless they decline representation, elect to hire private counsel, or have counsel who was appointed by the court prior to the start of the pilot project. The Court and MidPenn Legal Services will also provide case data to the OEJC for analysis of grant goals and outcomes.

In Sept. 2022, the OEJC was awarded a three-year Elder Justice Innovation Grant from the federal Administration for Community Living to further its work to protect older Pennsylvanians and implement improvements in the handling of adult guardianships cases. Pennsylvania was one of three states to receive this grant.

The overarching goals of the OEJC’s grant are to:

- Assure due process for alleged incapacitated or incapacitated persons
- Improve guardianship monitoring capabilities to prevent abuse and exploitation

- Promote alternatives to guardianships.

The grant work in Pennsylvania is overseen by the OEJC, which was established by the Supreme Court in 2015. The OEJC is committed to protecting Pennsylvania's rapidly growing population of older adults from all forms of abuse and neglect; promoting best practices addressing elder abuse and neglect, guardianship and access to justice; and educating judges, court staff, attorneys, guardians, and the public about elder abuse and how to respond.

In collaboration with the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts, other elder justice entities, and branches of government, the OEJC works to enhance older Pennsylvanians' ability to fully participate in legal proceedings.

More information about the OEJC and its work to educate and prevent exploitation, abuse and neglect of Pennsylvania's older adults is available on its [website](#).

"This press release is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$1,313,667.00 with 75% funded by ACL/HHS and \$329,685.00 amount and 25% funded by non-government source(s). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government."

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