



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## News for Immediate Release

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### **Pa Supreme Court Advisory Council Releases Latest Progress Report and Data on Elder Abuse and Guardianship**

**HARRISBURG** — Focused on addressing critical issues confronting Pennsylvania’s elders, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts today released its latest progress report and data on the status of guardianships statewide.

“The progress recounted in this report represents our ongoing effort to address the challenges facing our commonwealth’s elders,” Supreme Court Justice Debra Todd said. “As Pennsylvania’s population ages, the court system faces an unprecedented challenge to monitor guardianships and protect our vulnerable adults from financial exploitation and abuse.

“The collective work of this council and our agency partners will become even more critical in changing and saving the lives and protecting the dignity of our elders.”

Since the [Task](#) Force report was released in 2014, from among the recommendations offered, the Council identified the need for a Guardianship Tracking System (GTS), which allows courts to better monitor active guardianships through a statewide uniform process.

“This report is a testament to the Pennsylvania Courts and their agency partners’ commitment and dedication to Pennsylvania’s older adults,” Montgomery County Common Pleas and Orphans’ Court Judge Lois Murphy said. “The collective accomplishments and initiatives continue to serve as a blueprint for courts and others to follow.”

“As a result of the Council’s work, including through the extraordinary challenges faced during the global pandemic, statewide guardianship data and other critical information is now available to guardians, interested organizations and the public,” continued Murphy. “This will change and save lives.”

Rolled out in 2018, the GTS permits courts to scrutinize red flags prompted on guardianship cases and respond to potential problems immediately, allowing better oversight and protection for persons under guardianship.

The statewide data contained in GTS allows the Advisory Council to track guardians' compliance with filing mandated reports and take a data-driven approach to guardianship reform.

"The ability to generate accurate and comprehensive statistics from the data collected by GTS is critically important, as nationally there is a dearth of information available on guardianship cases," said Advisory Council Chair, the Honorable Paula Francisco Ott. "With the data and additional information available, we are better equipped to address the needs and challenges facing Pennsylvania's aging population and to improve and protect access to justice for elders."

As of Dec. 31, 2021, there were more than 18,000 active guardianship cases in GTS, with 382 professional guardians and more than 19,000 non-professional (family/lay) guardians. The total amount of guardianship assets under court supervision was more than \$1.7 billion.

In addition to the new GTS data available, the Council has focused on efforts to educate judges, court staff, attorneys, guardians and the public about elder abuse and financial exploitation, including:

- Training programs, educational sessions and materials for judges including the Pennsylvania Guardianship Bench Book and Pennsylvania Elder Abuse Bench Book;
- Use of advanced communication technology as a means for homebound elders and long-term care residents to access essential support and court services, including participating in hearings;
- Virtual town hall sessions focused on the prevention of and response to elder abuse and financial exploitation and on recognizing alternatives to guardianship; and
- Training programs and resources for family and lay guardians about their powers, duties and responsibilities.

As the eighth oldest state in population age 65 and older, more than twenty-five percent of Pennsylvania's residents are over the age of 60, with more than eight percent of these older adults living below the poverty line. By 2034, there will be 77 million people age 65 and older compared to 76.5 million under the age of 18.

For more information on the work of the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts, visit <https://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/court-programs/office-of-elder-justice-in-the-courts>.

Read the executive summary and full report [here](#).

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