



DISABILITY RIGHTS OREGON

March 15, 2013

Chair Tomei and Members of the Committee:

Disability Rights Oregon (DRO) is the federally funded, non-profit law agency that provides protection and advocacy for people with disabilities in our state. DRO supports House Bill 2671 because creation of a State Office of Public Guardian and Conservator would serve to protect some of our state's most vulnerable adults from harm. While DRO works to protect the rights of Oregonians to maximum self-determination and freedom from restraint, there are times when people need assistance to make decisions about their housing, medical care and maintenance. When a person is at risk of serious harm and there is not a family member, friend or acquaintance to step up, a public guardian can fill the gap.

At present, there are an estimated 1575 to 3175 adults in Oregon who meet the criteria for needing a public guardian and/or conservator. They are mentally incapacitated, meaning unable to make decisions to such a degree that they are likely to face serious physical harm or illness; they are oftentimes victims of abuse, neglect and/or financial exploitation; they are without any family, friend or acquaintance to serve as guardian; and they are without the finances to cover the cost for guardianship. These vulnerable adults will continue to be in harm's way because there is no State Office of Public Guardian and Conservator in Oregon. They need long term assistance to act on their behalf to arrange for medical care, housing, and other care needs. The proposed State Office of Public Guardian and Conservator is uniquely designed to provide critically needed long-term assistance and protection on behalf of adults who are in dire need.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify,

Jan E. Friedman, Staff Attorney with Disability Rights Oregon