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Chair Tomei and Members of the Committee:

I am a private social worker working with family and professional guardians, and I teach guardianship classes at Portland Community College. I was the Public Guardian for Multnomah County for 18 years, a position from which I retired in 2009. I am not representing Multnomah County today. HB 2671 is not expected to impact Multnomah County, as there is already a Public Guardian program there. HB 2671 is intended to provide services for the rest of Oregon, and I want to explain how Public Guardianship impacts the service system and the community.

Nine out of ten individuals referred for guardianship do not require guardianship, they require really sophisticated care planning, so part of the role of a Public Guardian is to work with police, abuse investigators, mental health commitment staff and hospitals to solve problems without guardianship. Every case that is successfully diverted can potentially save tens of thousands of dollars a year in public and private service costs as well as result in life-saving care for the client. No public guardian program can afford to take any but the most desperate cases, those that will save public and private service dollars and time as well as stopping physical and financial abuse that just should not happen in our community. These are the "outlier" cases. A year before I retired, the Public Guardian's received a referral for an 86 year old woman with Alzheimer's who was one of Multnomah County's top 911 users for the calendar year. She used over 120 visits from EMTs, triggered by 911 calls that year, because she needed medical care for open leg ulcers due to diabetes that she could not manage due to advanced dementia. She refused to go to a care facility, and there was no legal way to place her without guardianship. We discovered that she was also among the top three emergency-room users for not one but two of Portland's hospital systems, as well as having eight hospital admissions, four in each system. In the year after guardianship was obtained she had no 911 calls, and one very brief emergency room visit, and she had all of her medical needs met.

In every community, there are a few problems related to serious abuse or self neglect, for which court-appointed guardianship is the only workable tool we currently have. This is a service of extreme last resort. In Multnomah County, less than one percent of clients receiving a public service are ever seriously considered for guardianship. HB 2671 would spread a thin layer of service across the rest of Oregon to address the situations that we all know should not happen to vulnerable people in our communities and stop useless churning through public and care dollars. The majority of states have Public Guardian programs available. Both California and Washington have programs that cover all geographic areas in those states. Thank you for considering making Public Guardian services available in the rest of Oregon.

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