

NJ  
10  
044  
1989e

PUBLIC HEARING

before

ASSEMBLY SENIOR CITIZENS COMMITTEE

"The Office of the Public Guardian for Elderly Adults:  
Can it meet an increasing caseload in a time of  
budget constraints?"

August 16, 1989  
Howell Township  
Administration Building  
Howell Township, New Jersey

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman Robert W. Singer, Chairman  
Assemblywoman Joann H. Smith, Vice Chairman  
Assemblyman Michael J. Arnone  
Assemblyman Edward H. Salmon

ALSO PRESENT:

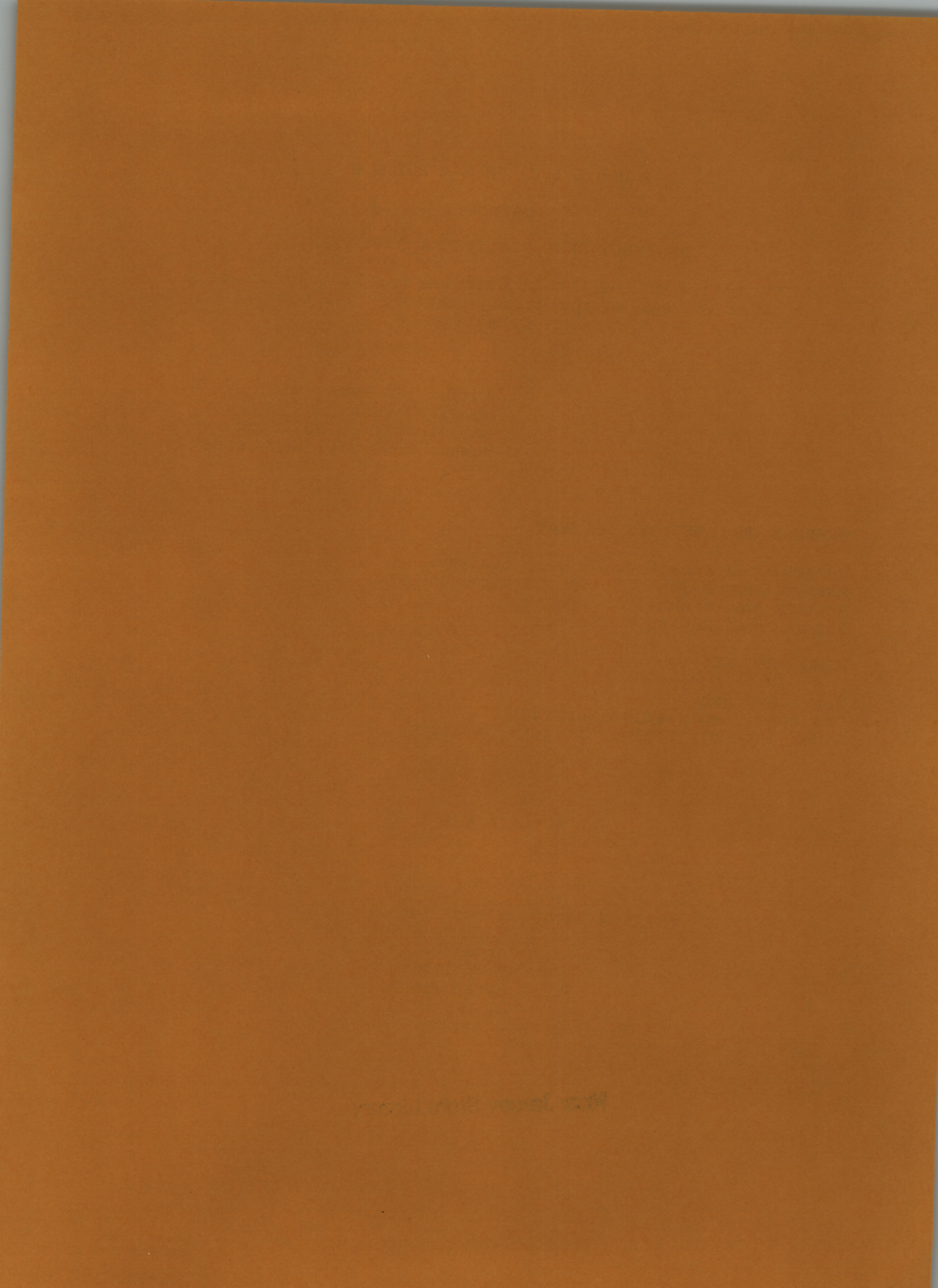
Norma Svedosh  
Office of Legislative Services  
Aide, Assembly Senior Citizens Committee

\* \* \* \* \*

Hearing Recorded and Transcribed by  
Office of Legislative Services  
Public Information Office  
Hearing Unit  
State House Annex  
CN 068  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

**New Jersey State Library**







ROBERT W. SINGER  
CHAIRMAN  
JOANN H. SMITH  
VICE-CHAIRMAN  
Michael J. Arnone  
ALAN J. KARCHER  
EDWARD H. SALMON

New Jersey State Legislature  
ASSEMBLY SENIOR CITIZENS COMMITTEE  
STATE HOUSE ANNEX, CN-068  
TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625  
TELEPHONE: (609) 292-1646

MEMORANDUM

August 4, 1989

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE  
FROM: ASSEMBLYMAN ROBERT SINGER, CHAIRMAN  
SUBJECT: COMMITTEE MEETING - AUGUST 16, 1989

(Address comments and questions to Norma Svedosh, Committee Aide)  
(609) 292-1646

-----  
The Assembly Senior Citizens Committee will meet on Wednesday, August 16, 1989 at 9:30 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. at the Howell Township Administration Building, Old Tavern & Preventorium Roads, Howell Township, New Jersey.

The agenda will be as follows:

- A-621 Provides for attorneys' fees in SSI claim appeals.  
(Foy)
- A-1120 Establishes spend down eligibility category for PAAD.  
(Moran/  
Singer)
- A-1127 Increases PAAD eligibility level for individuals with  
(Moran) dependent children.
- A-1897 Increases the annual deduction from certain real property  
(Miller) taxes for senior citizens and the disabled.
- A-3261 Exempts sales of pet food purchased by individuals age  
(Bush) 65 years and over for their pets from the sales and use  
tax.

- over -

Committee. Whatever bills have price tags on them usually wind up coming to the Committee that I chair, the Appropriations Subcommittee on Government Operations. However, we will not be having any meetings in the next couple of weeks. Probably within the next four to five weeks I'll try to schedule a meeting of the Appropriations Committee, of which Assemblywoman Farragher is Vice Chair. We're kind of parochial.

At least we know what the bills are that come up in our Committee.

I'm very happy to be here to share this morning with you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Sitting behind me to my left is Rick Colby. Rick is the Assembly Majority staff member who sits on this Committee and certainly helps everything run smoothly.

To my immediate left is Norma Svedosh. Norma is the Office of Legislative Services' Committee Aide to the Assembly Committee on Aging. Certainly, we appreciate the fine job she does.

To our far left is Ken Murphy, representing the Democratic Minority staff. Again, as soon as Assemblyman Salmon gets here, he will have his opportunity to be introduced to you.

Ed Salmon is on his way. He does come a very long way. Ed has always been a very attentive person to these meetings. He always comes, and we will certainly



increasing, but I actually have a smaller budget this coming year than I had in the year we just finished.

There are other reasons why our caseload has become too much to handle. The geographic areas in which the cases are located require heavy staffing. The distance that must be covered to visit each of the offices and wards, becomes very time-consuming and reduces the number of cases each case manager can handle. Some of the offices' legislative mandate is to mandate a client in a way that is least restrictive and increases the individual's quality of life. Even more time is required because of that mandate, of caseworkers and investigators.

For my caseworkers and investigators, residences must be turned into safe and clean living conditions. Some of them we have to completely rebuild to put individuals in them. Some haven't been repaired in as long as 50 years. And each of our cases in the beginning weeks takes 50 hours of staff time to find the assets, to check the property, to assess the individual and the care that will be required.

It is sometimes necessary for the office to go to court several times on each guardianship case. With the beginning hearing, it may continue. There may be additional requests from the court that we have to go back for. Then the attorneys additionally have to go back to court for approval of all sales of personal property. Upon the death of the ward, we must go back to court again for a final accounting. The bill does correct that portion of it.

A private guardian can automatically deduct fees from a ward's assets. We have to go to court every time. We still have to go to court until this becomes law, and request our fees from the judges. We are not always granted the fees. Some judges say that our legislation does not specifically allow us to take the fees. And they

feel, as a State agency, we shouldn't be charging fees. I don't happen to agree there. That is also corrected in the bill.

Even the time needed to care for wards who are in nursing homes is too much. The accounting section of the office-- In gathering the assets, in some cases that takes months and in some, it may take years before we find all of the assets. I can tell you about the cases where we'll find \$90,000 in a paper bag, money lying all over beds, in between magazines and newspapers, that are stacked seven and eight feet high. Just the search of a property sometimes can take many days for my investigators to gather the assets.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: We can get some volunteers to start helping you search.

MS. MUHLER: In most cases, I hope someone hasn't been there before us. There's no way of telling. If we don't move quickly to protect assets, you can imagine the vulnerability of these people.

We need to go in and change all the locks and secure the property and everything they own. It's amazing how quickly things can disappear that belong to our wards. You know, it would be easy if everyone that we dealt with was without money. Those are so easy. If the people don't have anything, they qualify for all the wonderful programs. It's those with modest assets that are being victimized from one state or the other, and those are the people that we'd really love to be able to protect.

When we get all those assets, I have a financial section that invests those funds and sees that the most that can be gotten for those funds is invested. We have to be very careful that investments are prudent, because we are responsible to the courts.

I have to say, in addition to that, the personal needs week by week, month by month-- If a person is in a home, we have to be sure that a health person that we contact there is taking care of them.

In one instance we had somebody padlock an individual in, and they went up a few days later, and we had to call the police. We're constantly monitoring, seeing that the lawns are mowed in the summer, snow is shoveled in the winter, heat is on, or air conditioning, whatever is necessary to make these very delicate people more comfortable.

I would also like to point out, I think we have to say that we are assisting people that are incompetent. A lot of people misinterpret what that means. That doesn't mean that someone doesn't know what's going on around them. We have many clients who are extremely intelligent and manipulative. We have to do a lot of training of caseworkers to enable them to help manage their lives. It's not an easy process. Some of them are easily victimized, because they don't know what's going on; others, because of their own mental illness, are difficult to manage -- such as alcoholism, diabetes, and other problems which are the background of some of the cases we get.

When you understand the amount of work in a case, and how this boils down for me, now my choice is-- Either we have a choice of funding at an adequate level to take care of everybody that may come before us -- and those numbers are rather astronomical -- or I have the ability to issue a freeze, when I realize I'm getting beyond the ability of my case managers to handle any more cases.

I think, you know, you don't want me in a position -- and I don't want to be in a position -- of jeopardizing those people who, through the court system,

have all their rights denied and are our total responsibility. I want to assure them, as long as they are with us, we want to restore rights for these individuals. But, as long as we are responsible, I want to be able to deliver an adequate amount of services to protect their lives. That's why I've requested the freeze right now.

I know the budget funds aren't there. I know I am requesting an additional fee structure to be able to appropriately charge fees. But, I know that people find it very difficult to say "No." It's the last thing in the world I really want to do, but I can't further jeopardize the huge caseload that we already have. That's why I've requested this freeze.

I also find that we would be liable for lawsuits, and negligent in other areas, if I were not able to manage the people we have. I wouldn't want to put the Office or the State in that position. So, I thank you very much for this hearing today.

I just want to point out that I think I've described the most important reasons why A-4752 and S-3063 are urgent legislation for my Office and for the vulnerable elderly that we care for.

I thank you very much for your time and consideration. If anyone is interested in going out on the road with me, just call my office. We'd love to have you see firsthand some of what we're doing.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Can you stay with us? There are some questions. Just for the public's information, this bill has been released from our Committee. What we are attempting to do, certainly, is to answer some questions out there. All the Committee members have supported the bill and encourage you also to get behind this legislation. It's a non-spending bill. It's a non-spending bill, but it's a very, very important bill for the senior community.



I want to go over the recent legislation in living wills, and how it supports what we're dealing with today.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM THE AUDIENCE: I wonder if you could tell us what the bill is about? We've had no reference or explanatory note.

MS. MUHLER: It's taken a lot of work on the part of my staff and the Assembly Committee and Senate Committee, in putting together the improvements in the Office.

When I was appointed three years ago, I was asked to go out and see what was needed for the Office and make recommendations.

We have found in a number of areas there needs to be improvement in the law. Some of it would allow me to automatically place liens on property for those people that have sizable estates, whose family has refused to take on guardianship, and that money should be coming back to the taxpayers.

The crucial part that we're discussing today deals with my ability to issue a freeze order to the courts that I am at my limit; I cannot take on any more cases unless I have additional staff.

Under the present statutes, the courts can order me to take as many cases as they choose to. They can make that order as complicated as they want, such as reporting every 30 days on what's happening with an individual.

In some instances, we have homes to sell, and we have lawsuits to settle, in trying to go back and retrieve assets. For those reasons, you know, and those limits that we have, I need the ability to either have funding enough to handle the cases, or the freeze, which is what this bill does. It allows me to issue the freeze, and the courts cannot order me to take any more cases -- and I won't be in

contempt if I refuse a case, which is what I was told by the courts.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Just for background, the courts would assign a private practitioner who would do this. What has happened is, now the courts assign everything to Marie. We have one or two choices. We can either allow Marie's division to grow and be the largest division in the State, and that can happen with the aging process, and the involvement, and the number of attorneys on her staff-- It can grow to be a very, very large department. Or, because we have money problems, turn around and allow-- By the way, we certainly didn't mean that at any stage a person would be left without a guardian. We go back to the alternate. The court would assign outside counsel to be guardian of that person.

Again, these are people that family members do not want to be responsible for, so they are turning to the State or the court to take responsibility.

Unfortunately, many times, the only time they want to hear about this is when there's an estate left. But the responsibility of that person and guardianship for that person, they are dropping in the State's hands.

Marie is crying out before there is a major problem, saying, "I need help." And I commend her for doing that, so we can avert any major problem in this field.

There are three people who want to speak. All three have pressing appointments.

The first person I would like to hear from is Dr. Gross who has come a long way. I know he has--

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM THE AUDIENCE: Give us a number of the bill.

MS. MUHLER: A-4752 and S-3063.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: That is waiting for a floor vote, by the way.

J O S E P H S. G R O S S, M.D.: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and other members of the Committee. Marie and I have many things in common, and one of the more interesting things, I think, we have in common is why we would take such a position, Marie, as the Director of the Office of the Public Guardian in this State, and myself as a physician.

Marie is at one end trying to improve the care and quality of all these senior citizens; and myself, by practicing, and Marie by trying to coordinate the necessary care for senior citizens that have been found incompetent by the courts--

I first became acquainted with the Office of the Public Guardian in 1987 when I was asked to be a member of Marie's Advisory Council. After only the first meeting, I was truly impressed by the dedication of all the members of her salaried staff, as well as the non-salaried members of the Council, and the dedication to the preservation of the individual's quality of life and dignity. Looking up what the true definition of a guardian was, I found it to be from the old French: "Guardian: One who watches or one who cares for." Certainly, Marie's Office fits that definition quite aptly.

The Office of the Public Guardian has met the needs of the frail elderly and the incompetent found, too. However, in order to accomplish this success, Marie Muhler's Office has assembled a group of individuals, quite diverse, but all share in the common goal to maximize the quality of life for such elderly individuals who are incompetent to care for themselves. Nurses, social workers, physicians, attorneys, bankers, appraisers, clergymen are just but a few of the team members that Ms. Muhler's office has assembled.



The majority of these aforementioned individuals are not salaried by the Office of the Public Guardian, but give of themselves voluntarily. Unlike other states, where guardians may place the special needs of the person after their own, New Jersey's Office of the Public Guardian has been the embodiment of what all guardians should emulate. With an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 elderly Americans currently under the care of court-appointed guardians, the national guidelines for proper guardianship should be considered.

To this end, the division will attempt to enlist some of those guidelines and spread the word as to what New Jersey's Office of the Public Guardian has been doing successfully in this State in the past for over three years.

There are some examples I can give, from personal experience, for this Office, when I came to the conclusion that, indeed, her Office has been able to provide optimum care, but without the ability of case freeze, I'm afraid-- I was asked to do an evaluation of an individual over two years ago, who was found to be incompetent by the courts, who is in a hospital, who had developed severe gangrene of the right leg. Unfortunately, the patient continued to have a deteriorated course. This was in very southern New Jersey. There were problems in communication between the medical staff and nursing staff of that hospital, and Marie's Office. However, when Marie's Office was asked to step in and investigate, they were able to uncover some important clinical information that was necessary to help improve the care of this individual.

After arriving at the hospital and spending several hours with the patient, the patient's family, and the staff of Marie's Office, we were able to come to some clinical decisions, which ultimately led to improvement in the quality of care of this individual. This is but one example.

There are other examples. In university hospitals -- State university hospitals -- where the quality of care is supposed to be top-notch and, indeed, some of the elderly patients that I was asked to see were not receiving such optimal care, when I was asked to evaluate these patients, I was, again, working in close proximity with the Office of the Public Guardian, and I was able to come to other clinical points which led to restoration of function, and improvement of quality of life for another impaired elderly.

Certainly, there are many more patients that are suffering out there that Marie's Office has not been asked to evaluate. But, unless she has the right to a case freeze, it certainly will reflect on the care of these future individuals. Now, the amount of time that's necessary to properly meet all the very special needs of these clients is more on the order of a 36-hour day. With the caseload in 1988 -- from what I have read of the accountability from her Office -- of 450, and an estimated caseload this year of nearly 500 clients, it will certainly not be possible to guarantee these individuals the right to improvement in quality of care, and to receive optimal quality of care.

It's my opinion that unless there is increased funding, and an ability to case freeze is enacted, the Office of the Public Guardian will no longer be able to honor every case that is referred to her Office for guardianship.

Some would say that Governor Kean has written that our Office of the Public Guardian is one more reason why people in New Jersey can grow old in comfort and dignity. But, without allowing the Public Guardian to case freeze when necessary, we certainly will not be able to live up to our Governor's promise. With that, I thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Would you just give your name and address for the record?

DR. GROSS: Joseph S. Gross, M.D., Medical Director of the Greenwald Geriatric Program at Monmouth Medical Center in Long Branch, New Jersey.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: The next person I'd like to call up is John Peterson from the Borough of Seaside Park.

MAYOR JOHN PETERSON: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today.

First off, I certainly want to state on the record that as a Mayor of a small town -- in my case the Borough of Seaside Park -- I can certainly say, on behalf of my citizens, many of whom are senior citizens, that I can truly appreciate the work that Marie Muhler has done, and the Office of the Public Guardian.

We appreciate the dedication, the hard work, and the compassion with which she has tackled the most difficult task. Above and beyond that, I can certainly state today that I am fully supportive of the proposed amendments that are placed before your Committee here today.

Certainly, our first and foremost priority should be that no elderly citizen of our State, no senior citizens who are truly in need of the services provided by the Office of the Public Guardian, go without those services. We, as a State, we, as a society, certainly can let no senior citizens be left unprotected. I am also -- besides being Mayor of Seaside Park -- a sole practitioner and attorney. I've had my offices in Seaside Park as well. I've been in practice almost nine years.

I can state for your Committee that when I first began my law practice, it was almost a unique situation, or rare event, when a client or family would call the office and make an appointment and would have some kind of a problem related to an elderly relative or elderly member of the family who simply had no one to turn to.



Tragically, for our State, I can say in the past two years and in this year alone, the situation has turned most devastating in a very sad direction, and it's almost a weekly event now, if not a daily event, when I get the call from some family, some family member, if not the senior citizen himself or herself, who simply calls the office and almost throws up their hands and says, "What can I do? What can I do now? I just cannot cope with either the forms, the bureaucracies involved, the fact of growing old."

The bureaucracy involved is trying to make sure whatever benefits that person is entitled to are available to them. And, most particularly, the very tragic situation when that person thought that they had planned their whole life ahead of them, thought that they had planned their retirement years, and due to the vast increase in property taxes imposed upon them, now are faced with a situation where they cannot maintain their home.

This situation gets all the more critical, certainly, when there are no relatives in the immediate area who can lend a hand; or sometimes they are unwilling to lend a hand.

I think I can appreciate all the work that this Committee has done in this area, I certainly agree with the Chairman's thought. As an elected official myself, we all have a moral duty to protect those that have given us all our opportunity to forward ourselves and our careers, and to raise a family in this State. Certainly, our senior citizens deserve our first and foremost consideration. I can say that it is a very sad situation when a family comes into my office with this kind of plight. Often it's a case now where there is simply no money in the bank, and the individual may or may not be mentally incompetent. They, certainly, sometimes are confused when faced with life itself, and they are left with a home that, on paper, appears to be a vast asset.

But, as we all know, in the shore areas, if not in the entire northeast sector of the country, the real estate market right now is not there, and that vast asset that they are being taxed for simply is not something that can be translated into readily available cash. They are sitting on something, and it's a situation that brings tears to these people's eyes, and certainly to anyone who has to talk to them and confer with them in an office, when they come in and say they simply can't make it.

I think we all -- as suggested earlier this morning in your consideration of the various bills before you -- have a duty, and certainly the State Legislature does as well, to find some alternate funding for various programs. Certainly, for this one in the State of New Jersey, funding does not depend upon the local property tax. That particular tax is the most discriminating and unfair to our senior citizen population.

I'd also like to place on the table my personal information or background concerning an alternate system of providing our senior citizens with some kind of help when the Office of the Public Guardian simply becomes overwhelmed with the numbers of cases.

I know I've had an opportunity to do a little research and look at the vast increase that the Office has felt in the last few years when it had 10 clients in 1987, which grew to 75 cases in '88, 212 cases in March of '89, and the projected 599 clients in the year 1990, with no increase in staffing or funding. I think that situation has certainly led to this most reasonable request from the Office of putting a cap on the cases and the freeze involved. And that in no way leaves the seniors unprotected, as you do have available to you the prior format, the prior system which allowed attorneys such as myself to be assigned by the judges throughout the county,

and to utilize the same parameters and the same kinds of services available as the Office would.

Certainly, I know the Office of the Public Guardian is very helpful and would continue to be so to attorneys who might be assigned in this area. Just on my own reasoning -- not necessarily selfish reasoning -- I would hope whatever system is developed, would consider the fact that sole practitioners often get assigned in the same numbers as some of the large law firms. It might be a more equitable system, if perhaps a funding-type device was devised similar to the public defender system, where you have a greatly reduced type fee schedule with a voucher system that provides attorneys, based on the numbers of the attorneys and not just the firms. Thereby, some of the large law firms also in the State who have the resources and the personnel to help out in this situation, would also be willing to do so, and would be assigned on that basis.

I'm sure, as with every profession-- Unfortunately, attorneys sometimes get a bad name, not necessarily with some of the issues before your Committee, but maybe in other issues of State import. I think attorneys, like plumbers, like roofers, you have very fine ones and very dedicated ones, and you have some that aren't so fine or so dedicated.

Certainly, I think the attorneys, and the profession in general, would be willing to handle the system on an alternate basis, while the Office of the Public Guardian certainly does its fine job, as it has done in the past with those cases that deserve to stay in that Office, and deserve their full attention.

I'm certainly fully supportive of the amendments placed before you today, and I appreciate the fine job your Committee has done in this area, and certainly the job Marie Muhler and the Office of the Public Guardian has done.



As a Mayor of a town comprised of many senior citizens -- and certainly as the son of my parents who are senior citizen retirees right here in Ocean County in our shore area -- I feel the devastating impact of what they are facing, and I'm surely very sympathetic to this plight as an elected official, and I offer to you my support and help in this area.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Enjoy your walk with Senator Bradley on your beaches. It never rains in Ocean County, John.

The next person I'd like to call on is the dean of the Assembly members in Monmouth County, although he looks a lot older than he really is, Assemblyman Joe Palaia. A S S E M B L Y M A N J O S E P H A. P A L A I A: Thank you, Mr. Chairman -- I think -- and members of the Committee. My name is Assemblyman Joseph Palaia. I represent the 11th Legislative District in the County of Monmouth. I must say, it's a pleasure to have the Committee down in this area. I think it's great that you would take the time to do this. I know the staff was looking to get out of the office anyway today, and I'm sure they looked forward to coming down here.

Just let me briefly say that I wholeheartedly endorse this legislation. It is not surprising to me that this bill would upgrade the standards of the Committee and also make it more efficient. It's not surprising, because Marie Muhler is like that. She won't rest until things are done well. I had the pleasure of serving with her in the Assembly for many years.

The issue of the guardianship is an emerging issue, often misunderstood by legislators, senior citizens, and the general public. New Jersey's elderly population is growing at a faster rate than the general population. To that end, we must provide the means for them to grow and

live in a proper manner. I think the guardianship we have provided for them is a step in the right direction, but, as in all legislation, it all needs review and evaluation. Since 1986, Marie has seen where we can improve that Office. I think this bill meets those needs.

A-4752 does many things, but it specifically provides that the guardianship should be appointed only in cases where the elderly adult is incompetent. That is very important. I think that's a key issue. Another key element of this piece of legislation is that the Public Guardian petitions the court over the authority of the senior citizen, if the services of the Public Guardian are no longer necessary.

Again, all I have to say is this legislation is needed. It's needed now. Its time has come, because to go on the course that we are right now is not serving the seniors of our State. I wholeheartedly endorse the legislation. Again, we thank you for coming into our area.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Thank you. It's always a pleasure hearing from you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SMITH: Ladies and gentlemen, for your information, this makes the whole thing complete. We have the 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th districts represented here today. That was the missing link. He showed up. Thank you, Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: The next person I would like to call is the Assemblywoman from this district, Clare Farragher.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARE M. FARRAGHER: You're welcome. I'm pleased to be here to support the Office of the Public Guardian and their request for a better tool with which to operate. Marie, of course, is my predecessor in the Assembly. I have become very aware of the changes in the operations of her Office through hearing her speak to different groups around Monmouth County.

Unfortunately, I was sitting here as Marie was speaking, and I was remembering pictures that she showed me during the budget process of some of the conditions they find in the homes of some of these unfortunate people. I was just getting goose bumps at the thought of some of the things that this Office finds. Their work is far too important to be held hostage to the resources or the revenues of the State. There has to be a better method of obtaining funding. If there are resources, they should be available to the Office without having to go through the link of the court procedure.

I was the co-sponsor with you, Mr. Chairman, of A-4309, which would allow the Office to place a lien on the estate. But I think we have to go beyond that.

I think the amendment that would allow the Public Guardian to provide the full compensation to any consultants that they have to hire is an important part.

I think A-4752 really does fill the gaps that were left by A-4309. I wholeheartedly support A-4752, and ask to be a co-sponsor of A-4752.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: That's no problem. We appreciate your remarks on that. Marie, can we have you take the microphone again? Do you wish any more testimony? The Committee has some direct questions they wanted to ask Marie first, and then we will open it up.

I have some concerns as to the legislation of, certainly, the living will, which passed the Senate this week. It is now in the Assembly. I would just ask you to share with us a little bit, your thoughts about any additional burden that's going to be put onto your Office, if that is passed -- where the guardian is appointed by the court.

MS. MUHLER: Well, I would begin by saying I testified very strongly in support of the living will



legislation. You know, it's a tremendous responsibility to make the kinds of decisions that I have to in these cases. And it's very, very helpful if someone has a living will. Whether people agree or disagree on that, I think it's an issue of great controversy. My only job is the interest of that individual, and if they have a living will, and that's their direction and they ask to have it honored, I will honor it.

The first thing we do in the case is make an assessment of that individual's viewpoint in many, many areas, because things happen rather suddenly. They can be doing very well, and any one of us, at any age, can suddenly become ill and have major decisions that have to be made. So, our first interviews are what their viewpoints are. We look up all wills, living wills, or if we are just dealing with the estate, we interview the ward that we have. We interview friends, family, everyone involved.

There are times when an individual wants every method used to preserve life. I have a number of people that have stated that. That request will be honored.

There are others that have DNR orders, do not resuscitate. I feel my obligation as the Guardian is to honor their wishes. I take their place. It's not untold to make pronouncements as to what they should or shouldn't be. In cases where there is no direction, I call on people like Dr. Gross and the oncologist that I have on my volunteer and Advisory Council, and we get into long discussions on the quality of life, the extent of disease, and the amount of pain that individual has, to help make those decisions. Out of the 300 people that we have, I think maybe we received our first two people with living wills. Whether it's law or not, I feel I should honor it. When I do, I notify the courts, and when I make a major

decision in a right-to-die issue, I also notify the courts of what I'm doing, so we don't do it in a vacuum. If anything, that living will legislation I see as helping my office, not hindering.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: I will now open it up to the Committee for questions of Marie.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SMITH: What was your budget cut this year?

MS. MUHLER: Well, it was over \$350,000, almost one-third of my budget.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SMITH: What's your total operating expense?

MS. MUHLER: Eight hundred thousand. I was at \$1.2 million this year. I have been allowed to take some carried forward, but I am trying to replace six positions that I lost during the freeze. So far I only have budget approval for three of the six, and those are people that I lost.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SMITH: How do they channel the money over to you, specific allocation? Is there any way we can get into that without legislation, into Human Services in particular? Because part of the function comes from Human Services.

MS. MUHLER: We work with Human Services. We are an autonomous agency located in the Department of Community Affairs. I have a specific allocation. OMB has agreed to look at my budget and include me in the budget process. Even up until this year, I was never even included in budget discussions of my Office on the Department level, so it is very difficult to fight for your budget when you have to knock on doors everywhere else, and you're not part of the actual planning.

I submit the paperwork, but I was never there in person to debate the issue. It's just one more

complication. Actually, I'd love it if I could just run my Office and not have to deal with all the bureaucratic work. I don't know where else to go. I asked the Division on Aging. I felt I should be entitled to Federal funding. I've applied for grants to the universities in the State. They have prepared the grants and applied to the Federal government. Both grants that we applied for in the past two years were not granted.

I try everything possible to find money -- knock on doors in Washington. We have requests in Federal legislation, which I feel very strongly about -- the work we do for the Federal government in processing Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare.

One of the things I'll be able to do when this bill passes, hopefully, is to bill Medicare and Medicaid for the portion of work we do for our clients.

I'm trying in every way possible to find the moneys to be able to operate, and that's one of the resources that I'm tapping.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SMITH: You know, you served on Appropriations with me before you left. I know you're aware of the fact that there are discretionary funds within certain divisions, such as DCA in particular.

My concern is, isn't there a way we can get into -- even though we've cut back in many areas-- In your particular case, the cost was even greater because you had less money to work with. Is there any way we can free up some of those moneys? Because, they know for a fact there are moneys in Human Services that have to be made available on an emergency basis.

MS. MUHLER: Human Services, in my area, doesn't deal with anyone 60 and over when we've asked backup from their agencies. We've been at all the regional meetings that they've had. What has happened, since the Office was

created, the other agencies shut all doors, and the minute we take a case, that's it; social workers are gone, and we have to take over everything.

In some instances -- not even with the backup files -- we need to even put the information together. Whether they will, I don't know, because I hear the same thing from them that I hear everywhere else, and their budget is cut back. Actually, Human Services wrote a letter to its people, because some of the counties did take on guardianship. There is only one that will still do it. All of the other local agencies absolutely refuse. That was automatically done.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SMITH: I would like you to please share that information with us: Who gave that direction, and under what authority? Is it because of the fact they happen to be head of a particular division, or something like that? That has to be addressed. You know what happened with the \$32 million that was just appropriated.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: I think, to be fair about it, that's been a shortcoming, not having legislative oversight; administrative decisions are not legislative. But I certainly agree with Joann on the point she raised. That is another valid point. We may want to set up a meeting to bring in some of these people from Human Services to discuss why they've done this, administratively. Maybe they can reconsider it, and not force us to make some of those changes legislatively. Maybe we can talk about that and get to--

ASSEMBLYMAN SALMON: I was going to make a couple of comments, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I appreciate your testimony here, and I know, if you could, you would want to serve everyone.

MS. MUHLER: I would never want to say no.

ASSEMBLYMAN SALMON: I know. That's always been part of your career as a public servant. Putting a freeze on is like a safety net for those people who really need service. If you can't provide it, are you going to make a recommended plan of action for the judges, as far as how that could be handled?

MS. MUHLER: Justice Wilentz is setting up a meeting. He has directed Bob Lipscher to organize a meeting. Really, it may serve the administrative end of government, but our cases-- The help goes to the judiciary, and they are very supportive, by the way. It may not sound that way, because I'm getting more cases than I can handle.

Actually, one of the reasons is because we provide a thorough service and are doing a good job, and the other is obviously the sheer numbers. I do have a meeting to attend.

The only other alternative I have -- when you talk about additional funding -- is the thought that was used in New Hampshire: a not-for-profit agency, aside from a private agency, and not a part of the government. If we can't afford it, there may be private foundations that may fund it. I don't know. I think it's an area that we have to cover in New Jersey and deal with.

The courts have been very supportive. I asked them that question, "If the agency were not part of the government, and was a separate nonprofit organization, would you still send cases to be managed?" And they would. At least the justices I've spoken with would.

However, I don't know how? They have no funds that they are able to give the Office. The only thing they do is decide whether or not we can accept fees. Since you have 21 counties, and 21 different viewpoints on what should or shouldn't be given to attorneys and caseworkers,



and everyone else in these cases, statewide legislation is particularly necessary, because I can't run an Office statewide and have to deal with rules that are totally different on income in each county, and this legislation does do that.

However, getting back to the courts, I am expecting to have some sort of direction and help from them very shortly.

ASSEMBLYMAN SALMON: The second part of my question is going to deal with fees. Do you feel that there is some mechanism or idea or approach that can be taken, so that you can get private fees, say, for example, from the clients that you're serving as far as the courts following through and assessing them, and what you have done, and what your staff has done to assess these clients on a fair basis?

MS. MUHLER: That's a portion of it. That's the lien legislation that they put in. I've already trained my staff. They've been doing this on a time billing system, so that we track every bit of time that all of my people put in and will bill at reduced rates where necessary.

ASSEMBLYMAN SALMON: I guess my next question is: What percentage of cases are you handling where that would occur?

MS. MUHLER: Quite a few. The easy ones are the ones without money. They qualify for everything. More and more, with the active protective agencies out there, they are finding people who are being abused, whose assets are being dwindled away, and there's quite a lot of them coming our way.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: That's part of the concept of the bill, and one of the concerns we have. Here's a case where no one in the family wants to take responsibility for the guardianship; totally ignore that

person. The person is dropped into the hands of Marie. They do all the work. They can be the guardian from one year to 30 or 40. A person passes away, and all of a sudden family members come and say, "Where's my share?"

The State should be reimbursed for doing that job first, and then give it back to the family members, but if we're going to take the responsibility that no one wants to take on, again, this goes back to, do you not allow State government to grow out of the control? If we don't do these types of things--

The funding source has to come from all the taxpayers. Why should we, as taxpayers, have to pay for something when there's money there for that? We're not talking about somebody in the State where the person wants to be the guardian. We're talking about where someone is negating their responsibility, and someone appears in her Office saying, "Where's my part of the estate? We're staying. We want to take our share." And your tax dollars are funded. If you can get that paid off, and they are not looking to grab the State's--

MS. MUHLER: The legislation came through the Judiciary Committee. There's a lot that you may not spot, but they lowered the amount of fees that a guardian can automatically charge, which meant there were less private guardians willing to take it on. There are also no fees when we sell homes, prepare for the closing, and put that together. When we go into court and ask for the 1% fee, sometimes we get it, and sometimes we do not get it. But that's still taxpayers' money, and if you're selling an asset, we should be receiving those fees, and they could be returned to the taxpayers. All of that is in there, too.

ASSEMBLYMAN SALMON: That's good.

ASSEMBLYMAN ARNONE: I'll be very brief. I'd like to publicly just express congratulations, and

compliment you on the compassionate manner in which you've attacked your responsibility. It comes from testimony that a friend of one of your recipients has mentioned to me. I just wanted to pass that along to you.

The program we have in the State of New Jersey-- How does it compare to other states? Is there a track record that we can learn something from? I'm not quite familiar with these programs in other states. I just leaned over and asked Rick that question.

MS. MUHLER: They are very different. New Jersey has the most comprehensive statewide program. What I did was write to every state that had a program, assessed what they did, and took the best that I could find out there. Then, we based a lot of what we did as the individual cases came into New Jersey, knowing what would be expected. You know, New Jersey is on the cutting edge of a lot of major issues when it comes to social services and due process and all of those other issues. We're very noted for that.

In some states the office is part of the judiciary, and every case is automatically assigned by the court. In other states, they don't have a hearing necessarily for an individual. They just go in and automatically have them declared incompetent. In Louisiana and in Hawaii it's also part of the judiciary. That's another statewide program. In Illinois, what happened there -- and I learned from that, and that was another area that dealt with human services -- the guardianship is a separate network in the sense that it's a board, and they were automatically, in two months, assigned 6000 people from the mental institutes and all of the other institutions in the state.

I don't think that was ever intended in our legislation, and it has been strong enough to zero in on

exactly what was needed -- taking care of the most vulnerable. If there are people taking care of individuals, if they are in institutions, you can't send it to an office that couldn't copy it as a rubber stamp, to just say "Yes" to everything, and deal with it that way.

We take in special medicals on a case-by-case basis, and send someone out. Also, some agencies only handle destitutes, and most of them are county by county. There are very few that will tackle this statewide as New Jersey has. In county by county, some of them are part--

In California, they are part of the coroner's office. I found that rather fascinating. When I went out there, it said "Welcome to the coroners' convention." I thought I must be in the wrong place. They do probate along with the county administrator, along with guardianship. As a matter of fact, the budget for the County of Los Angeles is \$9 million and \$10 million right now. It's just one county. That is much larger than anything we're dealing with here in numbers.

Others, like New Hampshire, started as a state agency, couldn't get funding, and they withdrew from a state agency. It is now a not-for-profit agency, and charges the state for every case. That's a lot more stable to operate with. I'm not sure I want to do it. I've been helping Pennsylvania and Vermont, and a number of other states, putting their legislation and offices together. It's something that we've all just become aware of, when, in the last few years, the Associated Press did a national expose on private guardianships.

In a lot of states there are private guardians who go out and take over the lives-- It was a major disgrace in Florida, where people were assigned by the court. They never had to report back in California. They have to see their people once a year.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Many times when I talk to senior groups, they talk about Florida, because they have extremely low property taxes and we've seen-- Time and time again, when you do a comparison of the type of services that are offered by the State of Florida to seniors, compared to New Jersey, it's not the same. It's major league being compared to Little League. That's the difference. And that's just one instance of the type of things that have been brought up about Florida.

MS. MUHLER: It's a major mix in Florida. There are not-for-profit demonstration projects and private individuals that can go and apply for someone in court. Can you imagine? And the person may not have a hearing to find that they are incompetent.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: The public has, too, been made aware. When you told me how they go out to the nursing home and see how that person is faring on a continual basis, to make sure they are being taken care of, nutrition is being looked after-- Everyone in this room can tell you histories of having someone in a nursing home and making sure they go on a constant basis to make sure the quality of care is given to them. If no one is coming in to check on someone, if no one is going to come in-- It's the squeaky wheel that gets the most attention.

When they know you're the guardian, and they know you come in, that person gets top priority, like everyone else in the home should be getting. That's important. It's just not a paper transaction. It is a physical transaction, where you physically protect that client and work with that client. That's a very time-consuming thing, when you talk about cases, 500 cases-- What's that, for the entire State? Would you just tell us how many total staff you have -- paid staff?



MS. MUHLER: Right now? We're about 16 or 17 for the entire State. That includes clerical finance, caseworkers, attorneys, investigators, everybody. We're all on the road a lot. When you compliment me, I have the most dedicated people you'd ever want to meet working for me. I will say the weekends, because people don't get sick and have emergencies nine to five. They usually have them at night, and there are about four or five of us that are on call 24 hours a day for emergencies. If someone needs surgery or is in a life-threatening situation, yes, a doctor can act. In those instances where someone needs to be hospitalized, or someone needs to be moved from a dangerous situation in a nursing home, we have to be there to say, "Yes, you can move them, or transfer them to the hospital," or it may not happen.

That's really, in a sense, a rewarding part of the job. When you add to the quality of life for people -- and we do in a lot of instances -- that is the most rewarding part of the job.

We have restored rights for a number of people, which I was told in Florida would never happen. We've already done it very successfully when people have recovered from surgeries.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: I'm always happy to hear these stories. These are not forgotten people, and these are not neglected people, and your Office does an excellent job, and we appreciate that very much.

Is there anyone else who wishes to testify? (affirmative response) Would you like to come forward and give your name and address for the record?

**M E Y E R S C H R E I B E R, PH. D.:** Dr. Meyer Schreiber, 391 Hall Court, South Orange, New Jersey. I just retired as a Professor of Social Welfare at Kean College, New Jersey. I'm speaking as a private individual.

Several years ago I was President of the New Jersey Coalition for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults. It was this group that worked on what became the legislation setting up this program that Ms. Muhler has.

In fact, we got then Assemblyman Frank Pallone to write the legislation, and so on.

One of the original thoughts we had in the legislation was, as professionals, none of us were as overwhelmed as Ms. Muhler indicates, with the numbers and the cascading caseload, because the need for the legislation indicated that there were going to be lots of people out there, and once you passed the legislation, more and more people would be coming in.

One recommendation that the Assembly Committee never wished to include was, we said in this technological age, and the fastness with which we approach matters, and the point of no return, there should be some attempt to evaluate, after a period of years, how this office was operating. We had suggested that at the end of three years, there should be a solid look at how the office was operating, because, as Ms. Muhler has mentioned, the survey indicated that New Jersey, in terms of guardianship, was horrendous; not only were attorneys falling down, the courts were falling down. What Ms. Muhler didn't mention was that the public guardian programs, particularly in Los Angeles, have been sued heavily, because they did no better than the attorneys.

Our group has stated that you need to pause before it becomes so solid in the fabric of government. One of my concerns, as a private citizen, is that there has been no critical look at this agency. Mr. Chairman, you mentioned legislative oversight. One of the problems with the Legislature of the State of New Jersey is it only goes back to matters when there's a crisis or there's a

scandal. There's no systematic way of looking at what happens.

The story in The Star-Ledger and The New York Times triggers all sorts of thoughts.

There's no calm, knee-jerk reaction. The kinds of human problems that Ms. Muhler has so vividly and graphically described, need to be evaluated. She's the administrator, and properly feels that she's doing a good job. I think it would be as helpful to her and her staff as it would be to the citizenry of New Jersey to get a reading that's independent, that's reliable, that's valid, that tells us about it. That's my first point.

The second point is one that is bothering me considerably. Ever since Ms. Muhler came to it, the horrible news that she thought they should close down-- This is a basic matter of public policy.

Assemblywoman Smith has constantly referred to the fact that this Committee deals with needs. Now, we read in the daily paper that the Division of Youth and Family Services, which deals with family tragedies, has a vacancy of 360 workers they cannot fill. Statutorily, morally, and legally, they still have to take care of children who were abused, neglected, abandoned, and so on.

The Division of Developmental Disabilities has to deal with the same problems, even though they are limited. Now, as a matter of public policy, how can we say no? Because, if you limit the intake to the guardianship program, what program will be next? What program will be slated, because one could easily say, "We have no money; therefore, we should shut down."

Now, the needs are horrendous. You've had them graphically and fully documented this morning. I think that this matter commands not only the attention of this Committee, but the entire Legislature has to think over,

what does it mean when you put a stop sign in the middle of the road and say, "No more traffic"?

Now, will it mean that lawyers will pounce upon this as another opportunity for making income and it's legitimate and so on? What other routes do we have? I don't think we have fully thought this through, and I'm not saying the Committee hasn't done its job, but I think there's need for more of a public dialogue. What are the implications of an agency saying, "No"? Now, it's very interesting that a bipartisan Joint Appropriations Committee cut the budget of this agency. Tells us something about how unaware we are--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SMITH: That's not the whole argument.

DR. SCHREIBER: --or whether we're putting this ahead of other priorities, or whatever. All I'm saying is, it's a matter that demands tremendous attention before we make a decision from which we cannot retreat, and which will have other implications.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Doctor, thank you for your comments. I want to share one thought with you: First of all, the department is in its infancy. It's really not fair to want to take a look at it two years or three years down the road, maybe longer than that. The first two years it was really finding its own way. I guess we all get a little bit tired of setting up commissions and funding commissions to do studies on studies on studies.

We are not allowed-- Unfortunately, we do not have legislative oversight. Our only alternative is to pass legislation. Maybe someday there will be one entity to review every agency and its performance on a continual basis to make that evaluation.

I always hesitate to set up another commission which has to be supplied with staff, or we throw onto another agency to find the help. I know Frances. We can talk about the problems we have in the Office of Aging, not having enough staff people to fund and do a lot of things we would like to do there.

DR. SCHREIBER: That doesn't have to be the avenue.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: True. Let me clarify your thoughts on that. I think Marie's group has come to us and said, number one, there are inequities in the way we wrote this. People that have money should be able to pay for it. That's one thing we're correcting.

Secondly, I think that we hear constantly how big government grows. When Governor Kean came into office eight years ago, the State budget was about \$7 billion. Today, we are looking at close to a \$13 billion budget, and people say to us, "What has happened?"

Well, what has happened is, we have met tremendous needs of the State that have grown and will continue to grow, if we do not do something. Marie would rather us be here. "Marie, hire those you need to hire to do the job in your Office." I'd be more comfortable doing that. I'm very impressed with Marie and her staff. I would like to see Marie do that. For example, part of her staff are attorneys. Today, these are professionals in their fields. She has other professional staff people. My fear is, we would be sitting here five years from now saying, why is this department \$35 million with a staff of 200? What has happened to this? You know, 10 years ago there was a staff of 16, and they handled 500 cases. They have hired 200-- I think we're trying to reach a compromise, whereas we understand the budget restraints. We understand Marie has restraints as to how large her division can grow.



We're reaching out to the private sector. The private sector is always one. Government grows too big.

We're willing to accept that, but we want strict guidelines. That's why her meeting with Chief Justice Wilentz is where we're heading for. It will not be business as usual. You're just assigned to be a guardian. If you're going to be a guardian, you're going to have to meet certain obligations. That means sending people out to meet with them. Maybe we're going to have to make it affordable. I have no sympathy, no sympathy at all, for someone in a family who does not want to take on their responsibility, and I think it is a responsibility for all of us. We have family members who meet that obligation to help out as that guardian and expect the taxpayer to pick up that burden, and then turn around when that person passes away and come in and get their share of the estate and say, "Well, that's your problem. That's your responsibility. That's what government is for."

In this particular case, I think we can work out, with the private sector helping us out, and under guidelines from the courts, telling them what their responsibilities are; being a guardian on paper and not seeing that person. You're right. When your committee did that fine job, many people were guardians on paper and never saw the person involved, or went once a year to that nursing home. Those things have to be corrected, but I think we've got to be realistic about sharing some of the burden on this. This is not going to be less a responsibility. It's going to be more of a responsibility. We hear different figures, and sit in meetings, and hear that by the year 2000, 100,000 Americans are going to be senior citizens. The population in my county is 29% senior citizens. This Office could become one of the largest offices in the State. Do you want to

address it in dollars and cents and say you have to take it on? Marie is saying to us, "If I don't receive help, we'll have the numbers, but we'll be in the same shape we were prior to this Office."

People are going to die in our care, and then you know what the public is going to say.

The story will be in The Star-Ledger: Why didn't the Public Guardian take a better look at this person? Why weren't they involved? Marie is ringing that bell, saying "We can't do it. Fiscally, you have to make a decision. If you continue to allow me to do it, I cannot be responsible for what is going to happen." I think that is something that we don't hear enough of. We hear about it afterwards.

You're very, very right about that situation with DYFS. That's a very disturbing situation. We had an outcry of child abuse and preventing that, and the only way that continues to be kept somewhat in check is the caseworker. We cut staff on that. You're right. The next thing we're going to read about is how this child abuse case went unchecked. What happened? It's just that fiscally, you have to be able to do that.

I think we've got to make sure it doesn't happen in this department. We have to involve the private sector, or make the kind of decision government wants to make, saying, "Okay, whatever you're going to send, we're going to have to spend it; whatever you're going to have to tax, go do it--" Right now we're not willing to do that.

Certainly, looking at these programs, we're trying to do that. You heard about the casino revenues. They have enabled us to get the bill passed for four years now. We had a bill two years ago. It was vetoed. It died. We've had the bill in the Senate for over a year. This Committee-- Every member here has been a part of that

bill as well as every senior group. That bill still has not passed in the Senate. The Governor is committed to sign it when it passes, fortunately.

We have certain restraints we have to deal with. I think this particular bill-- It's a difficult bill, I agree. It becomes a major policy decision, and something we all have to look at. I make this commitment to you: When it comes to a floor vote in the Senate and Assembly, I will mention the policy decision, because, you're right.

I don't think a lot of legislators understand that. The process is a very, very difficult process. There are 10,000 bills introduced into the Legislature every session. Unless you're directly involved in that bill, the only time you get that information is the week before you vote on it, and it's very, very difficult to get all kinds of input.

We rely a little bit on the Committee forum to look through those things, and we rely on the sponsors of the bills to make those statements on the floor before they are voted on. Your points are valid. Your concerns are valid.

You're looking to solve it.

DR. SCHREIBER: I may come back next year, and we'll have 50 seniors yelling, "We couldn't get guardianships."

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: All of us agree we'd like to be back here next year.

DR. SCHREIBER: You would be the first folks-- We have enough commissions and enough wasted money. I wasn't suggesting that. And I would say, I know Ms. Muhler somewhat. She would be the first to want an independent audit.

What I think, as a person who has been involved in social welfare for over 50 years, is, there are many

professional groups. For example, when cities and townships in New Jersey want to look at how their police department is doing, they go to International Police Chiefs in Washington. They send a couple of sophisticated people, and in two weeks they have a report. It doesn't fill a whole shelf. It's clear. It's unequivocal, and it's very, very related to their needs.

There are many groups in Washington. AARP has a legal advocacy group, the National Council of Senior Citizens. There are about 12 groups with little expenditure money that perhaps would be picked up outside who can do this kind of program audit, which would then make her argument more compelling, or come back and make you folks revise the bill. That's all I'm saying.

You mention how in eight years, government has grown. Now, I know the Department of Human Services and the Department of Community Affairs previously had programs that had no more of a staff than the Committee and the staff members up here. Now they have thousands of people. One wonders, as the gentleman commented -- the industrial engineer -- what are they doing? Where are so many people at?

Now, you talk about property taxes, but somehow we have to make sure we're getting more for our buck. We have to make sure that basic needs are being met. We have to be curious enough to look at what we're doing and say, "Is there a better way, or is there a different way?" without being defensive. And none of us has attacked the program that's being offered. We're saying we have to look for ways that could be alternatives that will strengthen what is going on, rather than diminish what is going on.

You may be interested in this: Every Office on Aging in the State has programs about guardianship. I know, because I've been speaking to groups and legal

services in the county. This is one way, hopefully, we'll lessen the burden. But it's a very long row to hoe, because people don't listen all the time. It's like talking to people about nursing homes. You say, "Oh, it's the other person, not me." So, it takes a long, long time to do this.

Again, I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee. I think you are really valiantly struggling with what's an impossible task you've been assigned.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: We thank you for your comments. The reason we've continued to hold these hearings is because we want you to know we think this is as important to us as it is to the population of the State. Even though the bill has come out of Committee, and is in position for a floor vote, we felt it was imperative that we speak about this issue statewide, so there is a clear understanding and groups understand it. We're not trying to put something through and change the direction of the State quietly in Trenton, hidden from the public eye. This is too important an issue to make up by ourselves.

We appreciate your input, and the input of others in the public sector, and your very, very valid concerns.

MS. MUHLER: I did want to point out on the question of the accountability that you brought up, it was Rutgers-- The grant was to do a study of guardianship and how effective it was, and what was happening in New Jersey. My part of it was to open my records to the University for them to study and evaluate what we were doing, too. So there was the attempt; however, the grant-- Yes, the grant wasn't approved, and that grant was for more money than I have now to operate my Office.

So, I didn't see any point in asking for anything else.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: They were going to give a grant for more money than the Office gets. When we talk about additional commissions and studies, the hair goes up on the back of our necks. There goes another way of spending money.

DR. SCHREIBER: Give it to Senator Proxmire and the Police Commission.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Is there anyone else who wishes to speak? (no response) Seeing no one else, we want to thank Howell Township, and Mike, for allowing us to come down to his district. We want to thank all of you for being here today, and your experience watching the process of our Committee is very important. We try to come out on the road, so you can see us in action. We're here to serve you, and serve the senior population.

Ed, I thank you and your lovely wife for the long trip. I think you get an award for coming the longest distance.

ASSEMBLYMAN SALMON: First of all, maybe I can make one comment, Mr. Chairman. As a freshman legislator, I've enjoyed immensely serving on this Committee, the Senior Citizens Committee. My district is Cape May and Cumberland County, so I came all the way from Ocean City on the Parkway, and our district has the second largest contingent of senior citizens.

I appreciate very much Chairman Bob Singer's efforts. He's been very helpful to me and very much in assistance. I know he's very concerned about the seniors, not only in his district, but throughout New Jersey. I appreciate your help during this first year.

ASSEMBLYMAN SINGER: Thank you. I appreciate that very much. Thank you, again. We will adjourn the meeting at this time.

(HEARING CONCLUDED)



