

## Resources

### Florida Abuse Hotline

1-800-962-2873 (1-800-96-ABUSE)

To report abuse, neglect or abandonment of a vulnerable individual

### Florida Department of Elder Affairs Helpline

1-800-963-5337

To identify local sources of assistance, including social services, housing and long-term care issues

### Agency for Healthcare Administration

1-888-419-3456

To report complaints about the quality of care in health care facilities

### Area Agency on Aging in Palm Beach and Treasure Coast

1-866-684-5886

To obtain information on services for seniors and persons with disabilities

### Agency for Persons with Disabilities

1-866-273-2273

To obtain or secure resources for persons with developmental disabilities

### Alzheimer's Community Care Crisis Line

1-800-394-1771

## Public Guardianship Program

The Legal Aid Society's Public Guardianship Program has been serving as the guardian of last resort in Palm Beach County since 1994 and expanded its services to include clients in Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie Counties in 2014.

The program is made possible by the generous support of the following agencies:



Board of County Commissioners of Palm Beach County

State of Florida Department of Elder Affairs



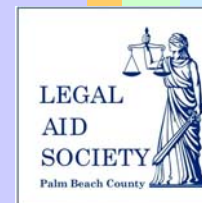
## Public Guardianship Program

*Do you know of any persons who are unable to make decisions in their best interest due to illness or disability and have no one to help manage their personal or financial affairs?*

*Do you have a client or patient who needs a legal guardian but has no family or friends willing to serve?*



The Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County's Public Guardianship Project can help you obtain the resources you need.



423 Fern Street, Suite 200  
West Palm Beach, FL 33401  
Phone: (561) 655-8944  
Fax: (561) 655-5269  
[www.legalaidpbc.org](http://www.legalaidpbc.org)

The Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County's **Public Guardianship Program** serves as the guardian of last resort for incapacitated individuals residing in Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie and Okeechobee Counties. Typically those in need have no family or friends willing or able to act on their behalf and lack the funds necessary to hire a professional guardian. We provide a full range of case management services based on the needs of the individual. These services may include consent for medical and mental health treatment, management of finances, procurement of benefits, education or other specialized services. Our advocacy enhances the quality of life for our clients.

### What is guardianship?

Guardianship is the process designed to protect and exercise the legal rights of individuals who lack the capacity to make their own decisions and have not made plans to address this possibility. A legal guardian is appointed by the Court to act on behalf of the person in only those areas dictated by the court order.

### What is incapacity?

Incapacity is a determination made by the Court indicating that a person is incapable of exercising certain legal rights. The Court removes these rights and delegates them to a legal guardian. Before a person is determined to be incapacitated, the



person is examined by a committee of three members, one of which must be a psychiatrist or other physician, and an attorney is appointed to represent the person at a court hearing.

### Why is public guardianship necessary?

Public guardianship is necessary when an incapacitated person lacks family or friends who are willing or able to assist and does not have sufficient assets to pay for the services of a professional guardian. As the population in Florida increases, there is a growing need for guardianship services for adults who have mental or physical disabilities including developmental disabilities and age-related disabilities. These vulnerable populations may be subject to abuse or neglect because they have no one to act or advocate on their behalf.

### What services do we provide?

The Public Guardianship Program is a team of professionals consisting of social workers, attorneys, bookkeepers and legal assistants who work together to develop a customized guardianship plan which protects the individual and maximizes their independence. The public guardianship team respects the choices and wishes of the individual to the fullest extent possible.

### What is our referral process?

Before referring a potential client to the Public Guardianship Program, all other solutions to address the person's needs should be explored, including referral to other social service agencies and contacting any known family or friends. To refer a client to the Public Guardianship Program, the following steps should be taken:

Obtain a Public Guardianship Referral Form by contacting Libby Spillane at:

(561) 822-9741 or  
lspillane@legalaidpbc.org.

Complete the referral form and return it by email, mail or fax:

Public Guardianship Program  
Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County  
423 Fern Street, Suite 200  
West Palm Beach, FL 33401  
Fax: (561) 822-9841

If the referral seems appropriate, the Public Guardianship Program will personally assess the person to determine if he/she meets the criteria for the Program.

The Public Guardianship Program will take the necessary legal steps to prepare the paperwork for court appointment.