

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 709 Guardianship
SPONSOR(S): Burton
TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 994

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
1) Children, Families & Seniors Subcommittee	9 Y, 0 N	Morris	Brazzell
2) Justice Appropriations Subcommittee	11 Y, 0 N	Smith	Gusky
3) Health & Human Services Committee			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Guardianship is a concept whereby a “guardian” acts on behalf of a “ward” whom the law regards as incapable of managing his or her own person or property, or both, due to age or incapacity. A court may appoint a public or private guardian if there is no family member or friend, other person, bank, or corporation willing and qualified to serve as guardian of that ward. Before a guardian may be appointed to act for the ward, a court must determine that the ward is incapable of handling his or her affairs.

HB 709 amends sections of law relating to guardianship, addressing the appointment of a guardian, orders not to resuscitate, information required to be disclosed in petitions for appointment of a guardian, mandated guardianship reports, and conflicts of interest. The bill:

- Requires the court to inquire into and consider potential disqualifications and potential conflicts of interest prior to the appointment of a guardian;
- Prohibits a guardian from consenting to or signing on behalf of the ward an order not to resuscitate without first obtaining specific approval from the court;
- Requires the petition for appointment of a guardian to disclose whether the guardian is a professional guardian, any alternatives to guardianship being used or previously used by the alleged incapacitated person, and the reasons why a guardian advocate or alternatives to guardianship are insufficient;
- Prohibits a professional guardian from petitioning for their own appointment, unless they are a relative of the alleged incapacitated person;
- Requires certain information about preexisting advance directives and preexisting do-not-resuscitate orders to be included in the initial and annual guardianship plans;
- Requires a guardian to declare all remuneration received by the guardian in the annual guardianship report and defines “remuneration”;
- Prohibits a guardian from offering, paying, soliciting, or receiving certain benefits in return for referring, soliciting, or engaging in a transaction for goods or services on behalf of an alleged incapacitated person or minor, or a ward, for past or future goods or services; and
- Prohibits a guardian from having specified interests with certain individuals unless court approval is obtained or such relationships existed prior to appointment and are disclosed to the court in the petition for appointment of a guardian.

The bill has an indeterminate fiscal impact on state and local governments.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2020.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Background

Guardianship

When an individual is unable to make legal decisions regarding his or her person or property, a guardian may be appointed to act on his or her behalf. A guardian is someone who is appointed by the court to act on behalf of a ward (an individual who has been adjudicated incapacitated) regarding his or her person or property or both.¹ Adjudicating a person totally incapacitated and in need of a guardian deprives a person of his or her civil and legal rights.² The Legislature has recognized that the least restrictive form of guardianship should be used to ensure the most appropriate level of care and the protection of that person's rights.³

The process to determine an individual's incapacity and the subsequent appointment of a guardian begins with a verified petition detailing the factual information supporting the reasons the petitioner believes the individual to be incapacitated, including the rights the alleged incapacitated person is incapable of exercising.⁴ Once a person has been adjudicated incapacitated (termed a "ward"), the court appoints a guardian, and the letters of guardianship are issued.⁵ The order appointing a guardian must be consistent with the ward's welfare and safety, must be the least restrictive appropriate alternative, and must reserve to the ward the right to make decisions in all matters commensurate with his or her ability to do so.⁶

Relationship Between Guardian and Ward

The relationship between a guardian and his or her ward is a fiduciary one.⁷ A fiduciary relationship exists between two persons when one of them is under a duty to act for or to give advice for the benefit of another upon matters within the scope of that relationship.⁸ The guardian, as fiduciary, must:

- Act within the scope of the authority granted by the court and as provided by law;
- Act in good faith;
- Not act in a manner contrary to the ward's best interests under the circumstances; and
- Use any special skills or expertise the guardian possesses when acting on behalf of the ward.⁹

Additionally, s. 744.446, F.S., states that there is a fiduciary relationship between the guardian and the ward and that such relationship may not be used for the private gain of the guardian other than the remuneration for fees and expenses provided by law. As such, the guardian must act in the best interest of the ward and carry out his or her responsibilities in an informed and considered manner. Should a guardian breach his or her fiduciary duty to the ward, the court is authorized to intervene.¹⁰

A guardian can either be a limited or plenary.¹¹ A limited guardian is appointed by the court to exercise the legal rights and powers specifically designated by the court after the court has found that the ward lacks the capacity to do some, but not all, of the tasks necessary to care for his or her person or

¹ s. 744.102(9), F.S.

² s. 744.101(1), F.S.

³ s. 744.101(2), F.S.

⁴ s. 744.3201, F.S.

⁵ ss. 744.3371-744.345, F.S.(?)

⁶ s. 744.2005, F.S.

⁷ *Lawrence v. Norris*, 563 So. 2d 195, 197 (Fla. 1st DCA 1990); s. 744.361(1), F.S.

⁸ *Doe v. Evans*, 814 So. 2d 370, 374 (Fla. 2002).

⁹ s. 744.361(1), F.S.

¹⁰ s. 744.446(4), F.S.

¹¹ s. 744.102(9), F.S.

property, or after the person has voluntarily petitioned for appointment of a limited guardian.¹² A plenary guardian is appointed by the court to exercise all delegable legal rights and powers of the ward after the court has found that the ward lacks the capacity to perform all of the tasks necessary to care for his or her person or property.¹³

Powers and Duties of the Guardian

The guardian of an incapacitated person may exercise only those rights removed from the ward and delegated to the guardian.¹⁴ The guardian has a great deal of power when it comes to managing the ward's estate. Some of these powers require court approval before they may be exercised.

Examples of Powers That May Be Exercised By a Guardian	
Upon Court Approval ¹⁵	Without Court Approval ¹⁶
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enter into contracts that are appropriate for, and in the best interest of, the ward. • Perform, compromise, or refuse performance of a ward's existing contracts. • Alter the ward's property ownership interests, including selling, mortgaging, or leasing any real property (including the homestead), personal property, or any interest therein. • Borrow money to be repaid from the property of the ward or the ward's estate. • Renegotiate, extend, renew, or modify the terms of any obligation owing to the ward. • Prosecute or defend claims or proceedings in any jurisdiction for the protection of the estate. • Exercise any option contained in any policy of insurance payable to the ward. • Make gifts of the ward's property to members of the ward's family in estate and income tax planning. • Pay reasonable funeral, interment, and grave marker expenses for the ward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain assets owned by the ward. • Receive assets from fiduciaries or other sources. • Insure the assets of the estate against damage, loss, and liability. • Pay taxes and assessments on the ward's property. • Pay reasonable living expenses for the ward, taking into consideration the ward's current finances. • Pay incidental expenses in the administration of the estate. • Prudently invest liquid assets belonging to the ward. • Sell or exercise stock subscription or conversion rights. • Consent to the reorganization, consolidation, merger, dissolution, or liquidation of a corporation or other business enterprise of the ward. • Employ, pay, or reimburse persons, including attorneys, auditors, investment advisers, care managers, or agents, even if they are associated with the guardian, to advise or assist the guardian in the performance of his or her duties.

A guardian, without first obtaining specific court authority, may not:

- Have the ward committed;
- Consent on behalf of the ward to any experimental biomedical or behavioral procedures;
- Initiate divorce proceedings for the ward;
- Consent on behalf of the ward to termination of the ward's parental rights; and
- Consent on behalf of the ward to a sterilization or abortion procedure on the ward.¹⁷

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ s. 744.361(1), F.S.

¹⁵ s. 744.441, F.S.

¹⁶ s. 744.444, F.S.

¹⁷ s. 744.3215, F.S.

Before allowing a guardian to consent to any of the above actions, the court must follow the procedure for extraordinary authority, as follows:

- Appoint an independent attorney to act on the incapacitated person's behalf and the attorney must have the opportunity to meet with the person and present evidence and cross examine witnesses at any hearing on the petition for authority to act;
- Receive as evidence independent medical, psychological, and social evaluations of the incapacitated person or appoint its own experts to assist in the evaluations;
- Personally meet with the incapacitated person to obtain an impression of the person's capacity and to allow the person the opportunity to express his or her personal views or desires regarding a "do not resuscitate order" (DNRO);
- Find by clear and convincing evidence that the person lacks the capacity to make a decision about a DNRO and that their capacity is not likely to change in the foreseeable future; and
- Be persuaded by clear and convincing evidence that the authority to consent to or sign on behalf of the ward an order not to resuscitate is in the best interest of the incapacitated person.¹⁸

There are also a number of duties imposed on a guardian. The guardian must:

- File an initial report within 60 days after the letters of guardianship are signed;
- File an annual report with the court consisting of an annual accounting and/or an annual guardianship plan;
- Implement the guardianship plan;
- Consult with other guardians appointed, if any;
- Protect and preserve the property of the ward; invest it prudently, apply income first to the ward before the ward's dependents, and account for it faithfully;
- Observe the standards in dealing with the guardianship property that would be observed by a prudent person dealing with the property of another; and
- If authorized by the court, take possession of all of the ward's property and of the rents, income, issues, and profits from it, whether accruing before or after the guardian's appointment, and of the proceeds arising from the sale, lease, or mortgage of the property or of any part.

A guardian who is given authority over a ward's person shall, as appropriate under the circumstances:

- Consider the expressed desires of the ward when making decisions that affect the ward;
- Allow the ward to maintain contact with family and friends unless the guardian believes that such contact may cause harm to the ward;
- Not restrict the physical liberty of the ward more than reasonably necessary to protect the ward or another person from serious physical injury, illness, or disease;
- Assist the ward in developing or regaining capacity, if medically possible;
- Notify the court if the guardian believes that the ward has regained capacity and that one or more of the rights that have been removed should be restored to the ward;
- To the extent applicable, make provision for the medical, mental, rehabilitative, or personal care services for the welfare of the ward;
- To the extent applicable, acquire a clear understanding of the risks and benefits of a recommended course of health care treatment before making a health care decision;
- Evaluate the ward's medical and health care options, financial resources, and desires when making residential decisions that are best suited for the current needs of the ward;
- Advocate on behalf of the ward in institutional and other residential settings and regarding access to home and community-based services; and
- When not inconsistent with the person's goals, needs, and preferences, acquire an understanding of the available residential options and give priority to home and other community-based services and settings.¹⁹

¹⁸ s. 744.3725, F.S.

¹⁹ s. 744.361, F.S.

Additionally, a professional guardian must ensure that each of the guardian's wards is personally visited by the guardian or one of the guardian's professional staff at least once each calendar quarter.²⁰

Who Can Be Appointed Guardian

The following may be appointed guardian of a ward:

- Any resident of Florida who is 18 years of age or older and has full legal rights and capacity;
- A nonresident if he or she is related to the ward by blood, marriage, or adoption;
- A trust company, a state banking corporation, or state savings association authorized and qualified to exercise fiduciary powers in this state, or a national banking association or federal savings and loan association authorized and qualified to exercise fiduciary powers in Florida;
- A nonprofit corporation organized for religious or charitable purposes and existing under the laws of Florida;
- A judge who is related to the ward by blood, marriage, or adoption, or has a close relationship with the ward or the ward's family, and serves without compensation;
- A provider of health care services to the ward, whether direct or indirect, when the court specifically finds that there is no conflict of interest with the ward's best interests; or
- A for-profit corporation that meets certain qualifications, including being wholly owned by the person who is the circuit's public guardian in the circuit where the corporate guardian is appointed.²¹

Appointment of Professional Guardians

A professional guardian is a guardian who has at any time rendered services to three or more wards as their guardian; however, a person serving as a guardian for two or more relatives is not considered a professional guardian. A public guardian is considered a professional guardian for purposes of regulation, education, and registration.²²

In each case when a court appoints a professional guardian and does not use a rotation system for such appointment, the court must make specific findings of fact stating why the person was selected as guardian in the particular matter involved.²³ The findings must reference the following factors that must be considered by the court:

- Whether the guardian is related by blood or marriage to the ward;
- Whether the guardian has educational, professional, or business experience relevant to the nature of the services sought to be provided;
- Whether the guardian has the capacity to manage the financial resources involved;
- Whether the guardian has the ability to meet the requirements of the law and the unique needs of the individual case;
- The wishes expressed by an incapacitated person as to who shall be appointed guardian;
- The preference of a minor who is age 14 or over as to who should be appointed guardian;
- Any person designated as guardian in any will in which the ward is a beneficiary; and
- The wishes of the ward's next of kin, when the ward cannot express a preference.²⁴

Additionally, the court may not give preference to the appointment of a person based solely on the fact that such person was appointed by the court to serve as an emergency temporary guardian.²⁵ When a professional guardian is appointed as an emergency temporary guardian, that professional guardian may not be appointed as the permanent guardian of a ward unless one of the next of kin of the alleged incapacitated person or the ward requests that the professional guardian be appointed as permanent guardian.²⁶ However, the court may waive this limitation if the special requirements of the guardianship

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ s. 744.309, F.S.

²² s. 744.102(17), F.S.

²³ s. 744.312(4)(a), F.S.

²⁴ s. 744.312(2)-(3), F.S.

²⁵ s. 744.312(5), F.S.

²⁶ s. 744.312(4)(b), F.S.

demand that the court appoint a guardian because he or she has special talent or specific prior experience.²⁷

The court may not appoint a professional guardian who is not registered by the Office of Public and Professional Guardians.²⁸ The following are disqualified from being appointed as a guardian:

- A person convicted of a felony;
- A person who is incapable of discharging the duties of a guardian due to incapacity or illness, or is otherwise unsuitable to perform the duties of a guardian;
- A person who has been judicially determined to have committed abuse, abandonment, or neglect against a child;
- A person who has been found guilty of, regardless of adjudication, or entered a plea of nolo contendere or guilty to, any offense prohibited under s. 435.04, F.S.;
- A person who provides substantial services to the proposed ward in a professional or business capacity, or a creditor of the proposed ward, may not be appointed guardian and retain that previous professional or business relationship, with exceptions; or
- A person who is in the employ of any person, agency, government, or corporation that provides service to the proposed ward in a professional or business capacity, unless that person is the spouse, adult child, parent, or sibling of the proposed ward or the court determines that the potential conflict of interest is insubstantial and that the appointment would clearly be in the proposed ward's best interest.²⁹

A court may not appoint a guardian in any other circumstance in which a conflict of interest may occur.³⁰

Conflict of Interest

Unless the court gives prior approval, or such relationship existed prior to the appointment of the guardian and is disclosed to the court in the petition for appointment of a guardian, a guardian may not:

- Have any interest, financial or otherwise, direct or indirect, in any business transaction or activity with the guardianship;
- Acquire an ownership, possessory, security, or other monetary interest adverse to the ward;
- Be designated as a beneficiary on any life insurance policy, pension, or benefit plan of the ward unless such designation was made by the ward prior to adjudication of incapacity; and
- Directly or indirectly purchase, rent, lease, or sell any property or services from or to any business entity that the guardian, or the guardian's spouse or family, is an officer, partner, director, shareholder, or proprietor, or has any financial interest.³¹

A guardian found to have such conflict of interest is subject to removal from the guardianship.³²

Office of Public and Professional Guardians

In 1999, the Legislature created the "Public Guardianship Act" and established the Statewide Public Guardianship Office (SPGO) within the Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA).³³ By December 2013, the SPGO had expanded public guardianship services to cover all 67 counties.³⁴ In 2016, the Legislature renamed the Statewide Public Guardianship Office within the DOEA as the Office of Public and Professional Guardians (OPPG) and required OPPG to regulate professional guardians. The OPPG

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ s. 744.2003(9), F.S.

²⁹ s. 744.309(3), F.S.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ s. 744.446, F.S.

³² *Id.*

³³ s. 744.701, F.S. (1999).

³⁴ Florida Department of Elder Affairs, Summary of Programs and Services, February 2014, *available at* http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/pubs/pubs/sops2014/2014%20SOPS_complete.pdf (last visited Dec. 4, 2019).

appoints local public guardian offices to provide guardianship services to people who have neither adequate income nor assets to afford a private guardian, nor any willing family or friend to serve.³⁵

There are 17 public guardian offices that serve all 67 counties.³⁶ In fiscal year 2017-2018, the public guardian offices served 3,846 wards.³⁷ Currently, there are 515 professional guardians registered with the Office of Public and Professional Guardians within the Department of Elder Affairs.³⁸ The total number of wards served by registered professional guardians in this state is unknown by DOEA.³⁹

The executive director of the OPPG is responsible for the oversight of all public and professional guardians.⁴⁰

The executive director's oversight responsibilities for professional guardians include but are not limited to:

- Establishing standards of practice for public and professional guardians;
- Reviewing and approving the standards and criteria for the education, registration, and certification of public and professional guardians;
- Developing a guardianship training program curriculum that may be offered to all guardians;
- Developing and implementing a monitoring tool to use for periodic monitoring activities of professional guardians; however, this monitoring tool may not include a financial audit as required to be performed by the clerk of the circuit court under s. 744.368, F.S.;
- Developing procedures for the review of an allegation that a professional guardian has violated an applicable statute, fiduciary duty, standard of practice, rule, regulation, or other requirement governing the conduct of professional guardians; and
- Establishing disciplinary proceedings, conducting hearings, and taking administrative action under ch. 120, F.S.

Guardian Compensation

The guardian, or an attorney who has rendered services to the ward or to the guardian on the ward's behalf,⁴¹ is entitled to a reasonable fee for services rendered and reimbursement for costs incurred on behalf of the assets of the guardianship estate unless the court finds the requested compensation to be substantially unreasonable.⁴² Before the fees may be paid, a petition for fees or expenses must be filed with the court and accompanied by an itemized description of the services performed for the fees and expenses sought to be recovered.⁴³ When fees for a guardian or an attorney are submitted to the court for determination, the court shall consider:

- The time and labor required;
- The novelty and difficulty of the questions involved and the skill required to perform the services properly;
- The likelihood that the acceptance of the particular employment will preclude other employment of the person;
- The fee customarily charged in the locality for similar services;
- The nature and value of the incapacitated person's property, the amount of income earned by the estate, and the responsibilities and potential liabilities assumed by the person;
- The results obtained;
- The time limits imposed by the circumstances;
- The nature and length of the relationship with the incapacitated person; and

³⁵ Department of Elder Affairs, *Office of Public and Professional Guardians*, available at <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/spgo.php> (last visited Dec. 6, 2019).

³⁶ Office of Public and Professional Guardians, *2018 Annual Report*, available at http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/SPGO/pubs/OPPG_AR_2018.pdf (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Email from Derek Miller, Legislative Analyst, Department of Elder Affairs, RE: HB 709 Analysis, (Dec. 9, 2019).

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ s. 744.2001(2)(a), F.S.

⁴¹ Fees for legal services may include customary and reasonable charges for work performed by legal assistants employed by and working under the direction of the attorney. S. 744.108(4), F.S.

⁴² s. 744.108(1), (8), F.S.

⁴³ s. 744.108(5), (7), F.S.

- The experience, reputation, diligence, and ability of the person performing the service.⁴⁴

Alternatives to Guardianship and Types of Guardianship

Before a plenary guardian is appointed, the least restrictive form of guardianship should be made available to assist people who are only partially incapable of caring for their needs and alternatives to guardianship and less restrictive means of assistance, including, but not limited to guardian advocates, should also be explored.⁴⁵

In October 2016, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga established a Guardianship Workgroup in order to better protect vulnerable people who are subject to guardianship and guardian advocacy.⁴⁶ The workgroup was charged with examining “judicial procedures and best practices pertaining to guardianship,” focusing on topics including, but not limited to, the use of least restrictive alternatives that address specific functional limitations.

The workgroup recommended requiring the petitioner, in the petition for appointment of a guardian, to explain why alternatives to guardianship are insufficient and expand the types of alternatives that must be addressed. The report specified alternatives to guardianship include supported decision making, durable powers of attorney, trusts, banking services, advance directives, medical proxies, and representative payees.⁴⁷

Additionally, the workgroup recommended the petitioner specify whether he or she is aware of the existence of a designation of preneed guardian and to identify his or her efforts in determining whether a designation exists in the petition for appointment of a guardian. Florida law recognizes several types of guardianships, including preneed guardians, and:

- Natural guardians;
- Guardians of minors;
- Emergency temporary guardianship;
- Standby guardianship;
- Preneed guardian for a minor; and
- Foreign guardians.⁴⁸

End of Life Decision-Making

Florida law defines an advance directive as any witnessed, oral statements or written instructions that express a person’s desires about any aspect of his or her future health care, including the designation of a health care surrogate, a living will, or an anatomical gift.⁴⁹ Designation of a health care surrogate, a living will, or an anatomical gift each serve different purposes and have their own unique requirements and specifications under the law.

One type of advance directive, a “do not resuscitate order” (DNRO) results in the withholding of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) from an individual if a DNRO is presented to the health care professional treating the patient. For the DNRO to be valid, it must be on the form adopted by the Department of Health, signed by the patient’s physician and by the patient, or if the patient is incapacitated, the patient’s health care surrogate or proxy, court-appointed guardian, or attorney in fact under a durable power of attorney.⁵⁰ Florida’s DNRO form is printed on yellow paper.⁵¹ It is the responsibility of the Emergency Medical Services provider to ensure that the DNRO form or the patient identification device, which is a miniature version of the form, accompanies the patient.⁵² A DNRO may

⁴⁴ s. 744.108(2), F.S.

⁴⁵ s. 744.1012(1), F.S.

⁴⁶ Judicial Management Council, *Guardianship Workgroup Final Report* (June 2018) (on file with Health and Human Services Committee staff).

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ ch. 744, part III, F.S.

⁴⁹ s. 765.101, F.S.

⁵⁰ s. 401.45(3), F.S.

⁵¹ Rule 64J-2.018, F.A.C.

⁵² *Id.*

be revoked by the patient at any time, if signed by the patient, or the patient's health care surrogate, proxy, court-appointed guardian or a person acting under a durable power of attorney.⁵³

Guardian Investigations

In July 2019, Steven Stryker, a ward appointed to professional guardian Rebecca Fierle,⁵⁴ died in a Tampa hospital after choking on food.⁵⁵ Hospital staff could not perform lifesaving procedures on him due to a DNRO executed by Fierle.⁵⁶

It was also reported that Fierle had billed AdventHealth, an Orlando area hospital, approximately \$4 million for services rendered to wards⁵⁷ and developed conflicts of interest with members of appointed examining committees used to determine incapacity of a person.⁵⁸

The Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller of Okaloosa County (Clerk)⁵⁹ investigated complaints filed against Fierle with the OPPG. The Clerk found Fierle had executed a DNRO against Stryker's wishes, violating the standards of practice established by the OPPG.⁶⁰ The Clerk reported that Fierle kept a DNRO in place after a psychiatrist examined Stryker while he was admitted to St. Joseph's Hospital and determined Stryker had the ability to decide that he wanted to live and stated that Stryker wanted to be resuscitated.

The Orange County Comptroller also investigated Fierle's guardianships.⁶¹ The Comptroller found Fierle had submitted over 6,000 invoices and charges of at least \$3.9M to AdventHealth for payments between January 2009 and June 2019.⁶² The payments were made on behalf of 682 patients. The Comptroller also found that in some cases Fierle had billed both AdventHealth and the wards for identical fees and services. Additionally, the Comptroller identified conflicts of interest, including several situations in which Fierle had previous relationships with wards to whom she was appointed guardian and did not disclose these relationships in the petitions for appointment of a guardian.

An Orange County judge removed Fierle from nearly 100 cases to which she had been appointed.⁶³ Fierle has appealed the judge's decision.⁶⁴ In a letter to the OPPG, Fierle resigned from all appointed guardianship cases (approximately 450 in 13 counties) in July, 2019.⁶⁵ As of November 2019, Fierle is under criminal investigation by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.⁶⁶

Effect of Proposed Changes

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ The Orlando Sentinel, *Florida's Troubled Guardian Program*, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/florida/guardians/> (last visited Dec. 6, 2019).

⁵⁵ Adrianna Iwasinski, *Orange commissioners approve new position to help monitor guardianship cases*, Click Orlando (Oct. 22, 2019), <https://www.clickorlando.com/news/2019/10/23/orange-commissioners-approve-new-position-to-help-monitor-guardianship-cases/> (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Supra* note 56.

⁵⁸ Monivette Cordeiro, *Florida's troubled guardianship system riddled with conflicts of interest, critics claim | Special Report*, Orlando Sentinel (Aug. 14, 2019), <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/florida/guardians/os-ne-guardianship-examining-committee-conflicts-20190814-osbekpwlfnfezneolyxtvzmrhy-story.html> (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

⁵⁹ J.D. Peacock II, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller Okaloosa County, Florida, *OPPG Investigation Case Number 19-064* (July 9, 2019), <https://www.scribd.com/document/417992870/Fierle-State-Report> (last visited Dec. 6, 2019).

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ Orange County Comptroller, *Report No. 479 – Investigation of Payments Made to Professional Guardian – Rebecca Fierle by AdventHealth*, <https://occompt.com/wpfb-file/rpt479-pdf/> (last visited Dec. 6, 2019).

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Supra* note 56.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ Greg Angel, *Embattled Guardian Resigns From Cases Statewide; Criminal Investigation Continues*, Spectrum News 13 (July 29, 2019), <https://www.mynews13.com/fl/orlando/crime/2019/07/29/embattled-guardian-resigns-from-cases-statewide> (last visited Dec. 6, 2019).

⁶⁶ Greg Angel, *Watchdog: Judge Dismisses Embattled Guardian's Appeal to Reverse Court Order*, Spectrum News 13 (Nov. 19, 2019), <https://www.mynews13.com/fl/orlando/news/2019/11/19/watchdog-fierle-appeal-to-reverse-court-order-dismissed> (last visited Dec. 6, 2019).

HB 709 proposes changes to chapter 744, F.S., relating to the appointment of a guardian, orders not to resuscitate, information required to be disclosed in petitions for appointment of a guardian, mandated guardianship reports, and conflicts of interest.

Appointment of a Guardian

The bill requires the court to inquire into and consider potential disqualifications under s. 744.309, F.S., and potential conflicts of interest under s. 744.446, F.S., when appointing a guardian to a ward. The bill also prohibits professional guardians from petitioning for their own appointment to wards, unless they are relatives of those prospective wards.

Do Not Resuscitate Orders

The bill requires a guardian to obtain specific court approval through the procedure for extraordinary authority before consenting to or signing an order not to resuscitate on behalf of a ward.

Petitions for Appointment of a Guardian or Professional Guardian

The bill requires petitions for appointment of a guardian or professional guardian to include the following information:

- Any other type of guardianship under part III of ch. 744, F.S., or alternatives to guardianship the alleged incapacitated person has designated, is currently in or has been in previously;
- The reasons why a guardian advocate or other alternatives to guardianship are insufficient; and
- Whether the guardian is a professional guardian.

The bill defines “alternatives to guardianship,” as it relates to disclosure in the petition for guardianship, as “an advance directive as defined in s. 765.101, a durable power of attorney as provided in chapter 709, a representative payee under 42 U.S.C. s. 1007, or a trust instrument as defined in s. 736.0103.”

Guardianship Plans and Reports

The bill requires the initial guardianship plan and the annual guardianship plan to include:

- Any preexisting do-not-resuscitate orders;
- Any preexisting advance directives;
- The date an order or directive was signed;
- Whether the order or directive has been suspended by the court; and
- A description of the steps taken to identify and locate such information.

Additionally, a declaration of all remuneration received by the guardian from any source for services rendered to or on behalf of the ward must be included in the annual guardianship report. Remuneration is defined as “any payment or other benefit made directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly, or in cash or in kind to the guardian.”

Conflicts of Interest

The bill prohibits a guardian from offering, paying, soliciting, or receiving certain benefits or engaging in split-fee arrangements in return for referring, soliciting, or engaging in a transaction for goods or services on behalf of an alleged incapacitated person, minor, or ward for past or future goods or services.

Additionally, unless prior approval is obtained by the court or such a relationship existed before appointment of the guardian and is disclosed in the petition, the bill prohibits a guardian from having any specified interest with:

- The ward;
- The judge presiding over the case;
- Any member of the appointed examining committee;
- Any court employee involved in the guardianship process; or
- The attorney for the ward.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1: Amends s. 744.312, F.S., relating to considerations in appointment of guardian.

Section 2: Amends s. 744.3215, F.S., relating to rights of persons determined incapacitated.

Section 3: Amends s. 744.334, F.S., relating to petition for appointment of a guardian or professional guardian; contents.

Section 4: Amends s. 744.363, F.S., relating to initial guardianship plan.

Section 5: Amends s. 744.367, F.S., relating to duty to file annual guardianship report.

Section 6: Amends s. 744.3675, F.S., relating to annual guardianship plan.

Section 7: Amends s. 744.446, F.S., relating to conflicts of interest; prohibited activities; court approval; breach of fiduciary duty.

Section 8: Provides an effective date of July 1, 2020.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

The bill would have an indeterminate impact on state court workload.

The State Courts Administrator estimates it is likely that there will be an increase in judicial workload due to inquiries the court would be required to make under the proposed changes in the bill. The impact is indeterminate due to the unavailability of data needed to quantifiably establish the increase in judicial time and workload as a result of the proposed changes in the bill.⁶⁷

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

The bill would have an indeterminate impact on the county Clerks.

The Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers Association (Clerks) estimates it is likely that there will be an increase in the number of items the Clerk's staff will have to review and will need to modify their internal procedures to accommodate the proposed changes in the bill, but the impact is indeterminate. The Clerks also estimate there will be an increase in auditing if additional complaints are received relating to "do not resuscitate orders," assuming the number of court hearings do not increase. If the number of court hearings increase, the Clerks will have an impact due to court docketing and related duties. The impact is indeterminate due to the unavailability of data needed to establish an increase in workload relating to guardianship cases.⁶⁸

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

None.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES