



Disability and Guardianship Project

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April 2, 2015

Honorable Maria Stratton
Presiding Judge, Probate Division
Los Angeles Superior Court
111 N. Hill Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Judge Stratton:

The actions you have been taking to improve the processing of limited conservatorship cases in the Superior Court have been noticed. Even though you only assumed a leadership position in the Probate Court in January, you have acted with all deliberate speed on several fronts.

You reached out to our organization in February with an invitation to meet with you to discuss our concerns with the manner in which limited conservatorship cases have been handled in Los Angeles. You were very attentive at the meeting and took copious notes as I outlined those concerns.

The lunch seminar you conducted for attorneys who want PVP appointments was significant in many ways. Some of the speakers on the panel shared concerns about the current system in a very forthright manner – raising issues that have not been addressed in previous PVP seminars over the past few years. In addition to being open to the need for corrections to the system, you were very direct in your admonition to attorneys to be real advocates for the client and not to be lured into a “best interests” role. You could not have been more clear about this.

Your presentation in Sacramento at the Senate Judiciary Committee was significant. Your willingness to disclose flaws in the conservatorship system in Los Angeles demonstrated your desire to improve the process. The fact that court investigators can only spend one day a week in the field caught the attention of Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson who chairs the committee. This disclosure was so important that I discussed its implications in a summary of the hearing that I subsequently published. The second disclosure – that many conservatees cannot be located – was equally important. The fact that hundreds or more of vulnerable adults who are under the protection of the court cannot be found is something that needs to be addressed immediately. I sent an administrative records request to the Superior Court yesterday to find out just how many conservatees with open cases fall into the “missing” category. We may have suggestions about this so I would appreciate a quick reply to that request.

Thank you for your openness to change. Since our goal should be the same – increasing the prospect of access to justice for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities – we should work together to identify ways to improve the system. Let’s meet again to move this process forward.

Very truly yours,

Thomas F. Coleman
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cc: Justice Harry Hull (Judicial Council)
Judge John Sugiyama (Probate Advisory Committee)