Spectrum Institute and Bettys’ Hope invite individuals and organizations to support a set of principles and goals that will guide efforts to reform probate conservatorship proceedings in California. Changes here can be a model for guardianship and conservatorship reform efforts in other states.

Many seniors and people with disabilities and their families have been victimized by a probate conservatorship system that fails to provide due process and access to justice to those whose lives are disrupted and often traumatized by judges and attorneys who are largely unaccountable. The purpose of the Declaration of Principles and Goals is to unify support for greater accountability through new laws and court rules as well as new monitoring mechanisms within the executive branch.

**Principles.** The principles underlying these reform efforts include respect for due process, the right to counsel, and access to justice for individuals whose lives and assets are targeted by these proceedings, as well as the need for the judges and attorneys who are involved in these cases to be properly educated, adhere to high ethical standards, and to be accountable for their actions.

**Reforms.** Some goals to improve the probate conservatorship system include:

1. **ethics reforms** shifting the authority to appoint, pay, train, and monitor the performance of lawyers and guardians ad litem from local judges to a neutral agency;
2. **fee reforms** designed to preserve the assets of seniors and people with disabilities by replacing the current profit motives of attorneys with a motive of public service under a managed-care and structured-fee model;
3. **pre-litigation mediation** as a requirement to initiating guardianship, conservatorship, and trust litigation in probate court;
4. **capacity assessment standards** for evaluating decision-making abilities and exploring less restrictive alternatives – requiring procedures in conservatorship proceedings that are fundamentally fair and that comply with the mandates and protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act;
5. **guardian ad litem appointments** would be rare and immediately appealable on a fast track;
6. **court watching methods** such as having trained volunteers monitoring proceedings; and
7. **state compliance bureau** to investigate abuses similar to the Guardianship Compliance Office that is operating in Nevada but instead to be operated here within an executive branch agency.

Spectrum Institute and Bettys’ Hope invite you to contact us with your support for these principles and goals. When you send an email or letter of endorsement, please tell us who you are and why you support these principles and goals. After gathering endorsements, we will develop a plan to advance the reforms through specific action items that will be publicized and shared with endorsers.

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Spectrum Institute and Bettys’ Hope are California nonprofit organizations.