



2100 Sawtelle, Suite 204, Los Angeles, CA 90025 • (818) 230-5156
www.disabilityandabuse.org • nora-baladerian@verizon.net

May 15, 2014

Hon. Michael Levanas
Presiding Judge, Probate Department
Los Angeles Superior Court
111 N. Hill Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: The Need for Comprehensive Reform of the Limited Conservatorship System

Dear Judge Levanas,

On February 18, 2014, I met with you to discuss the concerns of our Project regarding the manner in which the Probate Court processes and adjudicates limited conservatorship cases. I shared with you an essay that I had written which identified problems with the "Limited Conservatorship System." As you may recall, I mentioned to you that we became involved with this system as a result of pleas for help being directed to us in three separate cases. As we looked into these cases, we realized the problems were systemic in nature.

I have continued to conduct research into this system in the weeks and months following our meeting. I reviewed online dockets for scores of cases and reviewed dozens of documents from case files on the court's computer system at the courthouse. I interviewed court-appointed attorneys and attended a training seminar for PVP attorneys. I attended a presentation given by Bet Tzedek Legal Services at the Beverly Hills Bar Association. I also studied relevant constitutional law, statutes, and court rules.

Our Project held a conference on the Limited Conservatorship System on May 9, 2014, which was attended by family members in three cases, a conservatorship attorney, Regional Center workers, a private fiduciary, a public guardian, and a range of other interested parties. A conference on violations of the voting rights of limited conservatees will be held on June 20, thus a copy of this letter is being sent to the Secretary of State.

Our Project is conducting the most in-depth analysis of the Limited Conservatorship System that has ever been done in California. Our preliminary findings are quite disturbing. From our perspective as advocates for people with developmental disabilities, we see routine and systematic violations of their rights by the Limited Conservatorship System and its various components. We see the need for *comprehensive* reform – changes in both the policies and practices of judges, court staff, attorneys, the bar association, Regional Centers, and other nonprofit organizations that are or should be involved in this system. We also see the need for more legislative oversight, as well as additional legislative appropriations to properly fund the system.

While our initial focus has been on practices in Los Angeles County, we believe this is a statewide problem since state statutes, state funding, and statewide court rules are contributing to the problems we have identified. As a result, we see the need for the Judicial Council, the State Department of Developmental Services, the California Legislature, and the Attorney General to be involved in formulating solutions.

We invite you to meet with us to discuss our preliminary report, *Justice Denied*, a copy of which is enclosed. We also look forward to having productive conversations with other officials and agencies at the state level.

cc: Judicial Council
Department of Developmental Services
Assembly Judiciary Committee
Senate Judiciary Committee
Attorney General
Secretary of State

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas F. Coleman".

THOMAS F. COLEMAN
Legal Director