

**From:** Disability and Abuse Project <tomcoleman@disabilityandabuse.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 26, 2015 9:00 AM  
**To:** 'Bishop, Aaron (ACL)'  
**Subject:** An open letter to the Commissioner of AIDD  
**Attachments:** judiciary-committee-commentary.pdf

Mr. Aaron Bishop  
Commissioner  
Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities  
Washington, DC

Dear Commissioner,

We hear generalized calls to repeal or reform the adult guardianship systems all the time. We hear calls for alternatives to guardianship such as supported decision making (sdm) – demands being made by people at various conferences.

But when the rubber meets the road, when there is an actual opportunity for political reform, where are the troops?

We presented a detailed report this week to the Senate Judiciary Committee in California. We asked that a legislative Task Force be created to verify the level of dysfunction of the limited conservatorship system. Such a task force would include the various stakeholders, including the folks calling for sdm and guardianship reform.

Only one organization showed up to support our requests – The Arc of California. No self advocates, parent advocates, or funded agencies or advocacy organizations came to the hearing. Some are located right there in Sacramento, like the State Council on Developmental Disabilities, or the local regional center, or the local “area board.”

Disability Rights California was given 8 minutes at the beginning of the hearing. They did not call for conservatorship reform, nor did they even once mention supported decision making. They did mention people with disabilities in a generalized way, but they did not have specific suggestions about reforming the limited conservatorship system. I sent them a copy of our report and asked them to at least mention that there is a problem. No such mention was made. This was a missed opportunity.

Of all the other 15 speakers, there was almost no mention at all about people with disabilities. I was the only one to inject that issue into the hearing – forcing my way into the conversation during public comment. I managed to get three minutes on the issue of disability and abuse, and at the very end I had two minutes on disability and conservatorships.

This was supposed to be a hearing on how the courts are protecting seniors and dependent adults. As you know, “dependent adults” is a code word for people with developmental disabilities. Of the 180 minutes of hearing time, about 13 minutes was devoted to people with disabilities – 8 minutes of general statistics and general comments by DRC and 5 minutes by me. I made specific proposals, and also noted the lack of the word “disability” throughout

the hearing. I had only The Arc to show support.

We would like AIDD to follow up with the committee. A letter from you, as Commissioner, is not only appropriate but is necessary.

We are greatly disappointed by the lack of support from disability rights advocates at this important hearing. As the chairperson noted, the last oversight hearing was in 2005. That one focused solely on seniors. At this one, the deck was stacked for senior issues too. Seniors are important, to be sure, but so are people with disabilities. We did our best to publicize the hearing and to ask people to show up or at least write emails and letters. We know of only one email of support to the committee.

The State Council should send a letter supporting our call for a task force. So should DRC. These are federally funded agencies that are supposed to provide leadership and advocacy. And your office has clout. Please use your position of authority to nudge the Senate Judiciary Committee in the right direction.

The limited conservatorship system is a shambles. The rights of thousands of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are being violated. Yet virtually no attention is being given to this problem by DRC, the State Council, or AIDD. There is still time for action. Please help.

We would also like to hear your specific suggestions about what more can or should be done to remedy the problems we have identified in our study and report. We look forward to your reply as soon as possible so that action can be taken before the committee moves on to other issues and this hearing becomes a historical footnote.

Thomas F. Coleman

Nora J. Baladerian, Ph.D.

Spectrum Institute

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