

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1553

Estates & Trusts – Guardianship of the Person of a Disabled Person – Emergency and Temporary Guardianship Petitions Before the House Judiciary Committee [Insert Hearing Date]

Chairman Sandy Bartlett, Vice Chair Debra Davis, Delegate Alston, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is **Michele R. Harris**, and I am an attorney practicing in Southern Maryland. For more than two decades, I have represented elderly adults, disabled adults, and families in guardianship, CINA, juvenile, and protective order proceedings. I am here today to voice my **strong support for House Bill 1553**.

This bill fills a critical gap in Maryland law by creating a **clear and accessible process** for an interested person to request an **emergency hearing** when a vulnerable adult is being neglected by their current guardian. Under our existing framework, families and professionals often have no timely remedy when a guardian is failing to provide adequate care. HB 1553 finally gives the courts the authority and structure needed to intervene **before** a crisis becomes irreversible.

HB 1553 also expressly authorizes the court to establish an **access schedule** so that a vulnerable adult can maintain contact with family members and friends. Isolation is one of the strongest indicators of abuse or neglect. When a guardian cuts off communication, it often prevents loved ones from discovering that the adult is in danger. By allowing courts to order reasonable access, this bill protects not only the adult's safety, but also their emotional well-being and dignity.

Another major benefit of HB 1553 is that it will **substantially reduce delays** in guardianship proceedings. The bill requires emergency petitions to be heard within a defined timeframe and authorizes temporary guardianships when necessary. In guardianship matters, time is often the difference between safety and serious harm. This bill ensures that the court can act quickly, efficiently, and appropriately.

In short, HB 1553 strengthens Maryland's ability to protect vulnerable adults, provides families with a meaningful avenue for relief, and gives the courts the tools they need to respond swiftly to neglect.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report** on House Bill 1553.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to safeguarding Maryland's most vulnerable residents.