



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Kent County Commissioners Approve Deal to Protect Vulnerable Adults Impacted by State Budget Cuts**

**GRAND RAPIDS** – Some of the most vulnerable adults in Michigan are those who suffer from medical or mental health conditions and live in poverty. When these adults are hospitalized, they have the protection of staff; but once released, they may need a guardian or conservator to assist. Unfortunately, the Kent County Public Guardianship Program, which helped almost 400 people to pay for guardianship services, recently learned that certain supports provided by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) are no longer available to provide a safety net for these at-risk adults. Today, the Kent County Board of Commissioners took action to keep that safety net in place.

The Public Guardianship program for adults in Kent County services about 900 people; 383 of those serviced in the past year are labeled “indigent,” unable to pay the fees of a guardian. Recently, DHHS determined that funding for the one Adult Protective Services worker that performed the duties of the Guardian Monitor is no longer available. Concerns that the program would be unsustainable and not accept additional guardianship cases caused Kent County to do one of the things it does best – create a public/private partnership with two major hospital systems to keep services intact and growing.

Spectrum Health and Mercy Health St. Mary’s have each agreed to provide \$50,000 annually for the next three years to Kent County to support the Guardianship Program. “The DHHS cuts would leave these vulnerable adults with no one to care for them. This could have led to tragic outcomes,” said Daryl Delabbio, Kent County Administrator/Controller. “Over the past year, county staff from Probate Court and my office looked at a tough situation and found a sound resolution with great partners: Mercy Health Saint Mary’s, Spectrum Health and the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan. There is no other program like this in the State of Michigan.”

Mercy Health Saint Mary’s says the program is critical to our community. “Mercy Health Saint Mary’s recognizes the value that the Guardianship Program provides to our patients and the community,” said Bill Manns, President, Mercy Health Saint Mary’s. “In order to maintain the program and mitigate further reductions from the state, Mercy Health is pleased to partner with Kent County to ensure guardians are available to our patients.”

Spectrum Health says they believe the program helps some of our most at-risk adults. “This program helps patients who lack the capacity to make health care decisions, when family members are either unavailable or unable, said Tina Freese-Decker, president, Spectrum Health Hospital Group. “Having qualified individuals with legal authority to make decisions on behalf of these patients helps ensure appropriate levels of care in the right environment, in the best interest of the patient.”

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The unanimous vote was applauded by Probate Court Judge David Murkowski. "We had a lot of good people come together and collaborate on this," Judge Murkowski told the Board after the vote. "This action makes me proud to live in Kent County."

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