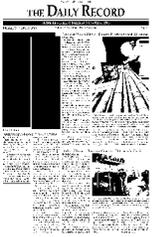


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## Guardianships to Be Reviewed

The Administrative Office of the Courts has instructed clerk magistrates throughout the state to begin a systematic review of every guardianship assigned to Judith Widener of Safe Haven, Inc. This directive was issued last Monday, immediately following the release of a report from the State Auditor which included what appears to be irregularities regarding Widener in certain guardianship cases.

The case review will include an examination for improprieties, whether or not monies were being handled, and the name of the person or entity requesting the appointment of Widener. Each case must be reviewed on an individual basis.

As noted in the audit report, some courts had discontinued using Widener and others had begun greater scrutiny.

In recent years, the guardian and conservator process has undergone changes through legislation and Supreme Court rule to increase the safety and security of those in need of court oversight.

In the summer of 2010, Chief Justice Michael Heavican, in cooperation with the Legislature, initiated the process to review state laws related to the vulnerable population. The Joint

Review Committee on the Status of Adult Guardianships and Conservatorships in the Nebraska Court System was established and charged with recommending any changes needed in the guardianship/conservatorship statutes or court rules.

The review committee of judges, court staff, and legislators issued a Report of Final Recommendations in the fall of that same year. Since that time, court staff, judges, lawyers, committee volunteers and advocates for the elderly have been working toward implementation of improved safeguards recommended by the Committee.

Along with increased monitoring in each case, the courts now require the submission of bank statements along with annual accountings. Additionally, the courts require that copies of all documents in a case be sent to family members and others interested in the individual.

According to State Court Administrator, Janice Walker, "The Nebraska court system recognizes the special needs of the elderly and the vulnerable. We anticipate that the need for competent, dedicated guardians and conservators will continue to increase as Nebraska's population ages."