



New York State Unified Court System

Office of the Administrative Judge • 10th Judicial District (Suffolk County)

Hon. Andrew A. Crecca
District Administrative Judge

Lorie-Ann Bitetti
Deputy District Executive

August 21, 2025

Hon. Edward P. Romaine
Suffolk County Executive
H. Lee Dennison Building
100 Veterans Memorial Highway
Hauppauge, New York 11788

Re: Guardianship Corp. Funding Support 2026

Dear County Executive Romaine,

In my capacity as the Suffolk County Courts District Administrative Judge, I ask that you please accept this letter in support of Guardianship Corp.'s 2026 budget request seeking [REDACTED] it may provide guardianship services to 12 additional wards. Your help last year in increasing Suffolk County's budgetary contribution to Guardianship Corp. proved vital in meeting the needs of the Court in addressing an exponentially rising inventory of guardianship cases. The County's current funding to Guardianship Corp. provides slots for 50 wards requiring guardianship services, and as of this writing Guardianship Corp.'s CEO, Robert Heppenheimer, advises me that all of them are full and demand for guardianships continues to grow.

The Suffolk County Guardianship Court Parts hear cases daily that involve individuals of all ages with profound cognitive difficulties, traumatic brain injuries, or medical events which have robbed them of their ability to perform the most basic activities of daily living. Some are veterans who are estranged from family members, others are old and infirm and virtually abandoned by their children, and still others are confined to nursing facilities and need someone to help them navigate benefits programs so they may live with dignity. Robert Heppenheimer's experience uniquely qualifies him to provide excellent guardianship services to those he serves. He had a long career in the nursing home field, possesses a strong background in governmental benefits, and maintains connections with resources for support for and assistance. In the private sector, the costs for his services would be exorbitant. Due to economies of scale, he can service those to whom Guardianship Corp. is assigned for far less and with greater efficiency. Guardianship Corp. is a lean-running nonprofit, and Mr. Heppenheimer is a hands-on CEO who, together with a Case Manager, a benefits manager, and an Office Manager efficiently serves the needs of his diverse and complex caseload.

As you know, most guardianship applications involve prospective wards that are often vulnerable due to mental and/or physical illnesses compounded with indigency. As such, the wards are often without anyone in their lives who can serve as their guardian. If Guardianship Corp. were not available to the Court, the effects would be crippling. Recently the Court's guardianship judges have had difficulty finding guardians properly equipped and willing to handle labor-intensive community based assignments, which require guardians to frequently visit the private homes of individual wards rather than meeting with multiple wards in a centralized location such as an institutional setting like a nursing home. Mr. Heppenheimer has truly stepped up to meet the Court's needs by agreeing to take on some of these more demanding community cases. Of note, Guardianship Corp. has agreed to appointments overseeing several cases involving younger wards, between the ages of 18 and 50, in community settings. These guardianships typically last longer and are more complex overall than those of wards later in their lifespans. Unfortunately, we have seen small nonprofit agencies in other jurisdictions lose funding and the resulting consequential harm to the marginalized individuals most in need is significant. I submit that we are fortunate that someone with Mr. Heppenheimer's depth of experience in guardianship matters is willing to serve and that he does so with selflessness and genuine kindness towards his wards.

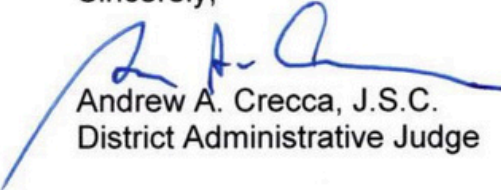
Supreme Court Justice Marian Tinari presides over guardianship cases in Suffolk County and heavily relies on Guardianship Corp. to assist her in the most difficult matters. She shared two of her many examples of the ways Mr. Heppenheimer and his team help their vulnerable clients. He handles cases with a rare combination of expertise and compassion — two recent cases particularly stand out:

"Paul " is an 18-year-old autistic person who was admitted to Stonybrook University Hospital as a social admit, after many years in and out of foster care, living on the streets and out of a car at times with his mother, and having no one to help him out of the hospital. Guardianship Corp. was appointed and worked tirelessly to address his needs; working with a complex web of involved stakeholders (DSS, School, Stonybrook staff, Family Court, family members) Guardianship Corp. succeeded in getting him out of the hospital and enrolled in residential school as well as applying for benefits on his behalf and purchasing requested items for him.

Another illustration of Guardianship Corp.'s exceptional work and ability to profoundly impact the lives of the most vulnerable is the story of "Sebastian". Sebastian was an undocumented man who was brought to South Shore University Hospital after a beating in which he sustained a fractured skull. After being medically stabilized, he was transferred to A. Holly Patterson Skilled Nursing Facility in Nassau County in 2021 for rehabilitation and long-term care. Through a series of events, in January 2025 he ended up at Stonybrook Hospital. Guardianship Corp. worked with the Social Work staff there to create and coordinate a plan to send him home to Guatemala, to be with his wife, children, and parents. Guardianship Corp. was able to obtain a passport for him and help facilitate his travel home, with an escort, to the arms of his family. At age 50 Sebastian faced the possibility of being in a nursing home for years, or worse but if not for the diligent, caring efforts by Guardianship Corp. to rehabilitate him and facilitate his safe travel home to his family.

Clearly, Guardianship Corp. fills a critical need at a fraction of the economic and societal costs of other alternatives. That said, there are few alternatives. In the past the Court relied on volunteer attorneys to fill the void, but that option is no longer available. Again, on behalf of the Suffolk County Courts, and those we serve, I recommend that the proposed budget submitted by Mr. Heppenheimer on behalf of Guardianship Corp. be granted in full. I very much appreciate your consideration and if you have any questions concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Andrew A. Crecca, J.S.C.
District Administrative Judge

CC:

John E. Imhof, PhD, LCSW, Commissioner of DSS
Dr. Sylvia Diaz, Deputy County Executive