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John Pacenti

Clerk's office gets \$20,000 to protect seniors in guardianships

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The Palm Beach County Clerk & Comptroller's Office just got more resources to rein in unethical court-appointed guardians of incapacitated seniors and other adults.

Clerk & Comptroller Sharon R. Bock was selected as the recipient of the 2015 Rosalinde Gilbert Innovations in Alzheimer's Disease Caregiving Legacy Award in the public policy category for her innovative guardianship fraud program and hotline. Bock accepted the award – which comes with \$20,000 for the office – during the Aging in America Conference in Washington D.C. on Tuesday.

Senior citizens and other adults who can no longer take care of themselves can be put in court-order guardianships under the complete control of a professional if a relative can not be agreed upon.


The Florida Legislature passed reform this past session, giving the state its first regulatory authority over these professional guardians who often have little prior expertise in handling finances or medical care for individuals.


State lawmakers received numerous complaints that unethical professional guardians were draining the savings

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of their senior ward through fees for themselves and their attorneys and failing to care for their elderly wards properly.

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Clerk & Comptroller Sharon Bock

The Palm Beach Post in its series this year, *Guardianship: A Broken Trust*, explored the judiciary's role in the guardianship system in the county that was beset by nepotism and cronyism.

The result was that Circuit Judge Martin Colin – whose wife is a professional guardian – was transferred out of the Probate & Guardianship Division. Colin then announced he would not run for re-election.

"It has become my mission to strengthen statewide guardianship laws ensuring our most vulnerable citizens receive the protection they deserve," said Bock said.

"This award reaffirms the need for our guardianship fraud program and hotline and will enable my office to continue to explore new ways to serve our rapidly growing senior population."

The guardianship hotline is 561-355-FRAUD (561-355-3728).

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Since the inception of the hotline in 2011, the Clerk & Comptroller's accredited Division of Inspector General has audited and investigated more than 900 guardianship cases and identified more than \$4.5 million in unsubstantiated disbursements, missing assets and fraud.

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