

Wisconsin's Guardianship Support Center (GSC) is a statewide resource providing: information, support, counseling, interpretation of related laws, technical assistance and education for consumers, guardians and other substitute decision-makers, family members and professionals (e.g. county elder adults/adults-at-risk/adult protective services [APS] staff, county corporation counsel, and staff at Aging and Disability Resource Centers [ADRCs] and Managed Care Organizations [MCOs]) who work with individuals on guardianships, advance directives, emergency detention, protective services/ placement and on identification and responding to reports of abuse, neglect and financial exploitation.

WAAN's Position: Increase Guardianship Support Center funding by \$100,000/year to meet increased demand for training and technical assistance for consumers, families, and professionals statewide (§ 46.977(1)).

The work of the GSC is delivered in four essential services:

- **Toll-Free Helpline**
- **Outreach**
- **Publications**
- **Guardianship Process Improvement**

The GSC is funded through a grant appropriation line (s.20.435(1)(cg)) housed within Wisconsin's Department of Health Services (DHS) budget. Funding for the GSC has been static at \$100,000/year for nearly 20 years and no longer covers the expenses of operating the program. In recent years, the volume and complexity of contacts (calls and emails) to the GSC continue to exceed the capacity of its one full-time attorney, despite administrative support to assist with helpline intakes, data entry, and resource publications. **Over the past three years, contacts to the GSC increased by 17% to nearly 3,000 contacts in 2023; additionally, GSC website traffic has increased by 20% during this time (over 18,000 page views in 2023).**

Implementation of the Guardian Training Requirements (§ 54.25) in early 2023 resulted in a further strain on the GSC workload. All potential new guardians are directed to contact the GSC with additional questions related to guardianship. The GSC's attorney continues to serve as a resource to ensure the accuracy and completeness of training content. **An increase of \$100,000/year would allow the GSC to hire additional legal and support staff to improve response times to calls and emails, resume outreach activities in key communities, and meet operational expenses, including updating and translation of current resources.**

The GSC is relied upon to serve the needs of Wisconsin residents and professionals, and many others. Each of the services the GSC provides would benefit from additional funding.

- **Toll-Free Helpline.** This primarily serves individuals with questions about adult guardianship, Powers-of-Attorney (POAs), or legal decision-making options, either to help loved ones, or those under guardianship with questions about their rights. **Additional funding would help meet increasing consumer education needs and improve response times to calls and emails.**

For 2022, contacts included:

- Residents of 90% of Wisconsin counties (64/72)
- Questions from or about residents of 21 other states (typically questions about interstate recognition of POA documents or guardianship)
- Other callers included several state agencies, registers in probate, law enforcement, attorneys (including county corporation counsels), APS workers, health care clinicians and facilities, advocates, funeral homes, and banks.

“ I really appreciate your help and the help of the Guardianship Support Center. I provide your brochures to our guardians routinely (and sometimes repeatedly). GSC is a valuable resource for us! ”

County Register in Probate

- **Outreach.** The GSC is required to provide presentations and other outreach events as time permits. The GSC attorney provides an average of 25-30 presentations per year, but must also turn down more than a dozen additional opportunities due to limited time and lack of funding. **Additional funding would allow staff to increase outreach activities in key communities and respond to the increasing number of requests.** Examples of outreach opportunities include:
 - Presentations at professional conferences (social workers, attorneys, and corporate guardians) and training for MCO staff, APS workers, or ADRC staff.
 - Continuing legal education for guardians *ad litem*.
 - Presentations for the general public on advance directives and for parents of adolescents with disabilities as children transition to adulthood.
- **Publications.** The GSC is required to produce a quarterly newsletter, maintain an interactive Listserv and keep the GSC website updated. Additionally, the GSC produces publications for the public and professionals about guardianship and POAs. Many county courts distribute these resources to newly appointed guardians. **Additional funding would allow for regular updating of the publications and for more of them to be translated into Spanish or other languages. Currently, less than a third have been translated.** These publications include Do-It-Yourself guides to complete the state POA forms, information for parents of adolescents and young adults on guardianship and alternatives, and information on the process and legal requirements for filing for guardianship. GSC also provides brochures on the duties and responsibilities of a guardian and the completion of inventory and accounting documents.
- **Guardianship Process Improvement.** The GSC provides issue expertise to GWAAR staff, other organizations, state and local government employees, and various workgroups and task forces. **Additional funding would allow staff more availability to participate in this important work.**

Find this and other WAAN issue briefs at: <https://gwaar.org/issues-and-initiatives>

(1-2024)

Core member organizations

Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (ADPAW) • Alzheimer’s Association Wisconsin Chapter Board on Aging and Long Term Care (BOALTC) • Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association (WADSA) • Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging (W4A) • Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists (WABS) • Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors (WAND) • Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers (WASC) • Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance (WFACTSA) • Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA) • Wisconsin Senior Advocates • Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (WISCA) • Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

Mission

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) works with and for all older adults by educating community members and policy makers on priority issues while advocating for meaningful change. Learn more at <https://gwaar.org/waan>.