

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT & COMPTROLLER PALM BEACH COUNTY

JOSEPH ABRUZZO



CLERK ALERT

April 2021

Clerk's Office Guardianship Investigations Making a Difference

Guardianship has made national headlines in recent weeks, thanks to two movies – one documentary, one fictional – that place court-appointed guardianship squarely in the spotlight.

Both the documentary *Framing Britney Spears*, about pop star Britney Spears, and the fictional film *I Care A Lot* examine court-appointed guardianships and the issues that can arise in those cases.

At the Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller in Palm Beach County, our work on guardianship has made headlines for years, thanks to our investigations into allegations of fraud, waste and abuse by court-appointed guardians and anyone willing to exploit vulnerable people.

The Clerk's office has a proud history of leadership on guardianship issues. In my tenure as Clerk, I plan to shine a bright spotlight on the guardianship expertise we have here in Palm Beach County, and [the work our office does to protect people under guardianship](#) in our community.

Our office's [Division of Inspector General](#) is responsible for conducting audits and investigations of guardianship cases filed in the 15th Judicial Circuit, and works in conjunction with our Court Operations team to ensure reports are submitted timely, completely and accurately. Should any "red flags" appear during those reviews, it triggers a more extensive review of the case by the IG.

These reviews by our IG team can mean a world of difference for the victims of fraud. Consider the case of Lynrod Douglas, who has six separate felony cases pending in Palm Beach County, with the most recent arrest in February.

The arrest reports in four of those six felony cases specifically credit our IG team for discovering a total of \$79,210.07 that Mr. Douglas allegedly stole from his clients.

Thanks to our IG team, Mr. Douglas is no longer registered in Florida as a professional guardian.

The investigators from our IG team also play a key role in investigating guardianship fraud throughout Florida, as part of the Statewide Investigation Alliance. This partnership with the Florida Department of Elder Affairs' Office of Public & Professional Guardians (OPPG) allows accredited IG divisions within Clerk's offices to investigate legally sufficient complaints about the conduct of professional guardians statewide.

This partnership took full effect in 2017, and has resulted in high-profile arrests of

professional guardians throughout Florida.

Our team also serves as subject-matter experts, providing testimony on best practices in guardianship fraud investigations and giving presentations on prevention of guardianship fraud throughout Florida and the country. Our Deputy Inspector General and Chief Guardianship Investigator, Anthony Palmieri, also serves as the president-elect for the National Guardianship Association and is a board member for the Florida State Guardianship Association.

Movies like *Framing Britney Spears* and *I Care A Lot* can bring important issues like guardianship into focus for a short time, but our team's vital work in preventing guardianship fraud, waste and abuse will continue long after these movies are forgotten. They also will shine a light on the good work being done by guardians in Palm Beach County and statewide.

This September, our IG team will celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the office's Guardianship Integrity Assurance Hotline. I look forward to building on this success for years to come.



Joseph Abruzzo
Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

Learn more about the Clerk's guardianship fraud investigations at www.mypalmbeachclerk.com/fraud.

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CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT & COMPTROLLER
PALM BEACH COUNTY