



## Clay County and State Officials Join Forces to Target Guardianship Abuses

### - Task Force Announced -

*September 8, 2026* (Clay County, FL) Through our Clay County court system hundreds of children and vulnerable adults receive services through court-appointed Guardians. By statute, reports submitted by them are audited annually by Clerk's Office employees. Guardians can be family members, court-appointed professionals, or state-approved members of the public.

Guardianship audits focus on the wards' physical well-being, financial accounts, and status of their assets. When Guardianships are done legally and with compassion – which is the situation in most cases – these vulnerable adults and children are properly cared for, their finances and assets are protected, and they benefit from an appropriate relationship with their Guardians.

"When a Guardianship is mismanaged, or worse, conducted in an illegal or even criminal manner, the results can be devastating," said Clerk of Court Tara S. Green.

**This type of criminal activity is now the target of a new multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional Guardianship Task Force, which Clay County Sheriff Michelle Cook announced today at a joint press conference.**

"This is not about Guardians who are doing their jobs the right way – we know the vast majority in our community take proper responsibility – but this is about bad actors," Cook said.

Clay County Clerk's Office auditors and Clay County Sheriff's Office detectives have seen a variety of suspicious and illegal activity in recent months/years.

- Elderly residents abandoned at care centers or hospitals, bank accounts drained, and homes and personal property sold or foreclosed without the State's or Court's knowledge. For example, they recently uncovered exploitation of an elderly woman abandoned without any personal effects and whose bank account was depleted. Her monthly pension was taken and her property sold. She was left destitute, all while her medical bills went unpaid, defrauding a local care facility. This harmful activity was committed by a family member..
- Juveniles who never see their inheritance, funds or property, which makes the death of their parent or grandparent even more of a tragedy. For example, a case was uncovered last year involving someone who inherited a large amount of money, hundreds to thousands of dollars, that was quickly depleted by her guardian.

(continued)

The lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens are turned upside down and they can be left without even the bare necessities of life. Ethical, law-abiding Guardians helping the vulnerable in our county are not the problem. In fact, local leaders applaud the good Guardians and loving family members for their dedication.

The Clay County Clerk's Office and judicial partners will assist law enforcement in the fight against those who exploit Clay County's most vulnerable citizens. Sheriff Cook explained further.

"When someone is appointed as a Guardian, they are entrusted with something so important – the care, well-being and sometimes financial future of another person", she said. "It's a position of trust – and when it's abused – especially when the victim is a child, an elderly person, or someone who can barely advocate for themselves, we as law enforcement and public officials have a responsibility to act".

The Guardianship Task Force brings together many partners across the criminal justice system to identify, investigate, and hold accountable those who exploit individuals under Guardianship. All those involved can now better share information, identify criminal activity, investigate allegations, and ensure that cases involving vulnerable victims receive the attention they deserve.

This attention comes through three main areas of focus.

**Educate** prospective Guardians on the responsibilities and expectations of the role before they accept it.

**Report** concerns if you believe a guardian is acting inappropriately or exploiting someone in their care.

**Prevent** abuse, neglect, and exploitation by staying informed and speaking up.

Law enforcement and Clerk's Office staff encourage you to reach out with information.

Go to [clayclerk.com](http://clayclerk.com) or to [claysheriff.com](http://claysheriff.com) and search for "Guardianship" for directions on how to report your concerns about past or present Guardianship cases about which you suspect fraud, neglect or abuse.

Sheriff Cook concluded today's announcement with this warning. "While these are complex cases, we want to make sure everyone knows that we will be watching and if you're taking advantage of someone you have guardianship over, you will be held accountable".

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