

Supreme Court creates Commission on Guardianship and Conservatorship

April 13, 2017

The Supreme Court on April 13 created the Mississippi Commission on Guardianship and Conservatorship to develop recommendations to improve the way the courts protect children, vulnerable adults and estates.

“We are reviewing the court procedures to make sure that the most vulnerable among us are protected,” said Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam of Sumrall.

Justice Beam and Mississippi Judicial College Executive Director Randy Pierce serve as co-chairs of the 26-member commission.

The order signed by Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. says, “The Court hereby establishes the Mississippi Commission on Guardianship and Conservatorship and charges it with making recommendations for developing a statewide, comprehensive approach to improving the processes which establish and manage guardianships of the person and guardianships of the estate; modernizing the guardianship process through active court monitoring and oversight; and promoting transparency of the guardianship process to protect individual rights.”

Justice Beam cited recent examples of financial abuse and fraud:

- An attorney appointed by the court to serve as guardian over at least 10 different wards in Harrison County committed suicide in 2015 after his embezzlement of millions of dollars was discovered.
- Two women in separate, unrelated instances in Adams and Jones counties were sentenced to prison in 2015 after embezzling thousands of dollars from two elderly women under their care.
- An attorney was sentenced to prison in 2013 after using for personal benefit thousands of dollars intended for a minor ward for whom he served as court-appointed guardian in Rankin County.

Justice Beam said that she expects the Commission to submit recommendations to the Mississippi Supreme Court and appropriate state leaders regarding changes to court rules and state laws. The work is expected to last at least two years.

Chancellors serving on the commission are Catherine Farris-Carter of Cleveland, Joseph Kilgore of Philadelphia, Jacqueline Mask of Tupelo, Lawrence Primeaux of Meridian, Sanford Steckler of Gulfport and George Ward of Natchez. Other members are Resident Jurist Judge John Hudson of Natchez; Commissioner of Child Protection Services Dr. David Chandler; Jackson attorney Rick Courtney of the Special Needs Alliance; attorney Gray Edmondson of Oxford; State Board of Education member Johnny Franklin of Bolton; Access to Justice Commission Executive Director Tiffany Graves of Jackson; Special Assistant Attorney General Joe Hemleben, general counsel to the State Veterans Affairs Board; Department of Mental Health Community Services Bureau Director Jake Hutchins; Mississippi State Board of Health Chairman Dr. Luke Lampton of Magnolia; attorney and Mississippi Bankers Association member Nicole Lewellyn of Magee; Disability Rights Mississippi Executive Director Ann Maclaine; attorney David Marchetti of Ridgeland; attorney Bob Montgomery of Canton; Mississippi Chancery Clerks Association President Lisa Neese of Columbus; Department of Mental Health Division of Children and Youth Services Director Sandra Parks; former Coahoma County Chancery Clerk Ed Peacock III; attorney John Smallwood of Hattiesburg; and attorney Bob Williford of Ridgeland.

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