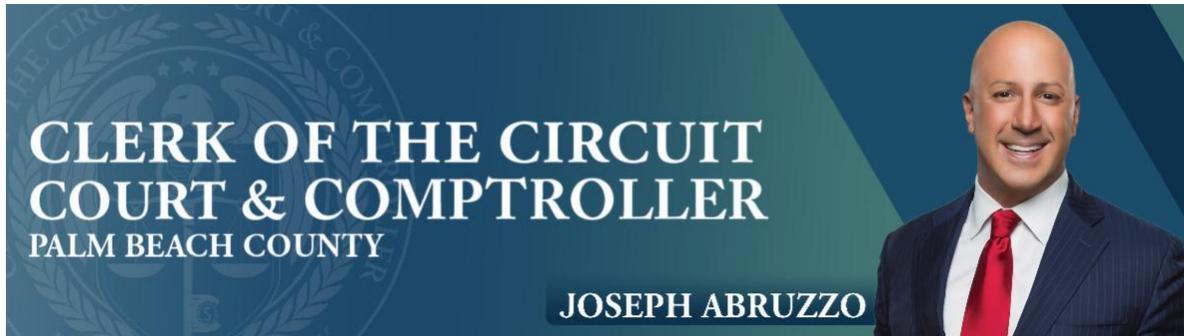


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## CLERK ALERT

### **Clerk's Guardianship Team: A Decade of Service to Palm Beach County**

Protecting our community's most vulnerable people has long been a priority of mine, and a priority of the entire team at the Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller.

For the past decade, our team has been a leader in guardianship fraud investigations, from the launch of the Guardianship Integrity Assurance Hotline in 2011 that allowed people to anonymously report possible cases of fraud in guardianship cases, to the creation of an online reporting system for guardians that was recently highlighted by a statewide task force for potential use throughout Florida.

Many people are familiar with our hotline, which is a trustworthy, go-to source for anyone in our community to report allegations of fraud, waste and abuse by court-appointed guardians or anyone willing to exploit incapacitated people. Tips to our hotline can be made online or over the phone, and are investigated by our Division of Inspector General (IG) team.

Since 2011, the Clerk's IG guardianship fraud investigators:

- Uncovered more than \$8.1 million in unverifiable and questionable expenditures by guardians
- Received 1,126 tips to our Guardianship Integrity Assurance Hotline
- Conducted 159 enhanced audits into Palm Beach County guardianship cases
- Referred 48 cases to law enforcement for criminal investigation

We are proud of the recognition our program has received in the past 10 years. Our Guardianship Integrity Assurance Hotline was among the first of its kind in the nation, and its success has spurred the creation of similar guardianship hotlines and programs throughout the United States. The program has received international recognition, and our office's subject-matter experts frequently provide trainings and testimony throughout the nation on guardianship investigations and spotting the signs of guardianship fraud.

Leading the way on this important work is our Deputy Inspector General and Chief Guardianship Investigator, Anthony Palmieri, who in the past 10 years has become a widely recognized expert on guardianship fraud. In 2022, he will serve as president of the National Guardianship Association, and will promote the organization's mission of advancing nationally recognized standards of excellence in guardianship.

Anthony also recently served as vice chairman of the Guardianship Improvement Task Force, which made a series of recommendations to the Florida Legislature in November on ways to improve the protection of people under guardianship throughout the state.

During the task force's meetings, our office demonstrated a system developed by our staff, that my team and I believe can be replicated and expanded statewide. Our office's Guardianship Inventory Reports & Accounting for Florida system, also known as GIRAFF, operates as a powerful auditing and monitoring tool for legal guardians. The information GIRAFF collects is kept confidential and allows us to share summarized information about the guardianship system with the public and decision-makers.

One of the challenges facing offices like ours, which are charged with monitoring guardianship cases, is the inability to efficiently track cases and collect data at a statewide level. GIRAFF can serve as the basis for a statewide system that would

give auditors access to information they need, while protecting the privacy of people under guardianship.

If you'd like to learn more about our guardianship investigations and other programs, please visit the [Guardianship Integrity Assurance Hotline](#) page on our website, [www.mypalmbeachclerk.com](http://www.mypalmbeachclerk.com). The work our office has done in the past decade has helped so many people in our community, and I look forward to building on that success for years to come.

Regards,



Joseph Abruzzo  
Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

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**JOSEPH ABRUZZO**  
CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT & COMPTROLLER  
PALM BEACH COUNTY