

CHAPTER 231E
PUBLIC GUARDIAN ACT

Referred to in §633.63

Table listing sections 231E.1 through 231E.13 with their respective titles and descriptions.

231E.1 Title.

This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Iowa Public Guardian Act". 2005 Acts, ch 175, §130; 2018 Acts, ch 1048, §2

231E.2 Office of public guardian — findings and intent.

1. a. The general assembly finds that many adults in this state are unable to meet essential requirements to maintain their physical health or to manage essential aspects of their financial resources and are in need of guardianship, conservatorship, or representative payee services.

b. The general assembly further finds that a process should exist to assist individuals in finding alternatives to guardianship, conservatorship, or representative payee services and less intrusive means of assistance before an individual's independence or rights are limited.

2. a. It is, therefore, the intent of the general assembly to establish a state office of public guardian and authorize the establishment of local offices of public guardian to provide public guardianship services to adults, when no private guardian, conservator, or representative payee is available.

b. It is also the intent of the general assembly that the state office of public guardian provide assistance to both public and private guardians, conservators, and representative payees throughout the state in securing necessary services for their wards and clients, and to assist guardians, conservators, representative payees, wards, clients, courts, and attorneys in the orderly and expeditious handling of guardianship, conservatorship, and representative payee proceedings.

2005 Acts, ch 175, §131; 2018 Acts, ch 1048, §3

231E.3 Definitions.

As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

- 1. "Client" means an individual for whom a representative payee is appointed.
2. "Commission" means the commission on aging.
3. "Conservator" means conservator as defined in section 633.3.
4. "Court" means court as defined in section 633.3.
5. "Department" means the department of health and human services.
6. "Director" means the director of health and human services.
7. "Guardian" means guardian as defined in section 633.3.
8. "Incompetent" means incompetent as defined in section 633.3.
9. "Local office" means a local office of public guardian.

10. “*Local public guardian*” means an individual under contract with the department to act as a guardian, conservator, or representative payee.

11. “*Public guardian*” means the state public guardian or a local public guardian.

12. “*Public guardianship services*” means guardianship, conservatorship, or representative payee services provided by the state public guardian or a local public guardian.

13. “*Representative payee*” means an individual appointed by a government entity to receive funds on behalf of a client pursuant to federal regulation.

14. “*State agency*” means any executive department, commission, board, institution, division, bureau, office, agency, or other executive entity of state government.

15. “*State office*” means the state office of public guardian.

16. “*State public guardian*” means the administrator of the state office of public guardian.

17. “*Ward*” means the individual for whom a guardianship or conservatorship is established.

2005 Acts, ch 38, §54; 2005 Acts, ch 175, §132; 2009 Acts, ch 23, §43; 2014 Acts, ch 1078, §2; 2018 Acts, ch 1048, §4; 2023 Acts, ch 19, §588

Referred to in §22.7(61), 235B.6, 633.63

Subsections 5 and 6 amended

231E.4 State office of public guardian — established — duties — department rules.

1. A state office of public guardian is established within the department to create and administer a statewide network of guardians, conservators, and representative payees who provide guardianship, conservatorship, or representative payee services if other guardians, conservators, or representative payees are not available to provide the services.

2. The director shall appoint an administrator of the state office who shall serve as the state public guardian. The state public guardian shall be qualified for the position by training and expertise in guardianship, conservatorship, and representative payee law and shall be licensed to practice law in Iowa. The state public guardian shall also have knowledge of social services available to meet the needs of persons adjudicated incompetent or in need of guardianship, conservatorship, or representative payee services.

3. The state office shall do all of the following:

a. Select persons through a request for proposals process to establish local offices of public guardian. Local offices shall be established contingent upon the appropriation of necessary funds to the department as determined by the director.

b. Monitor and terminate contracts with local offices based on criteria established by rule of the department.

c. Retain oversight responsibilities for all local public guardians.

d. Act as a guardian, conservator, or representative payee if a local public guardian is not available to so act.

e. Work with the Iowa developmental disabilities council and other agencies to establish a referral system for the provision of guardianship, conservatorship, and representative payee services.

f. Develop and maintain a current listing of public and private services and programs available to assist wards and clients, and their families, and establish and maintain relationships with public and private entities to assure the availability of effective guardianship, conservatorship, and representative payee services for wards and clients.

g. Provide information and referrals to the public regarding guardianship, conservatorship, and representative payee services.

h. Maintain statistical data on the local offices including various methods of funding, the types of services provided, and the demographics of the wards and clients, and report to the general assembly on or before November 1, annually, regarding the local offices and recommend any appropriate legislative action.

i. Develop, in cooperation with the judicial council as established in [section 602.1202](#), a guardianship, conservatorship, and representative payee education and training program. The program may be offered to both public and private guardians, conservators, and representative payees. The state office shall establish a curriculum committee, which

includes but is not limited to probate judges, to develop the education and training program. The state office shall be the sole authority for certifying additional curriculum trainers.

4. The state office may do any of the following:

a. Accept and receive gifts, grants, or donations from any public or private entity in support of the state office. Such gifts, grants, or donations shall be appropriated pursuant to [section 231E.9](#). Notwithstanding [section 8.33](#), moneys retained by the department pursuant to [this section](#) shall not be subject to reversion to the general fund of the state.

b. Accept the services of individual volunteers and volunteer organizations. Volunteers and volunteer organizations utilized by the state office shall not provide direct guardianship, conservatorship, or representative payee services.

c. Employ staff necessary to administer the state office and enter into contracts as necessary.

5. The department shall provide administrative support to the state office.

6. The department shall adopt rules in accordance with [chapter 17A](#) necessary to create and administer the state office and local offices, relating to but not limited to all of the following:

a. An application and intake process and standards for receipt of guardianship, conservatorship, or representative payee services from the state office or a local office.

b. A process for the removal or termination of the state public guardian or a local public guardian.

c. An ideal range of staff-to-client ratios for the state public guardian and local public guardians.

d. Minimum training and experience requirements for professional staff and volunteers.

e. A fee schedule. The department may establish by rule a schedule of reasonable fees for the costs of public guardianship services provided under [this chapter](#). The fee schedule established may be based upon the ability of the ward or client to pay for the services but shall not exceed the actual cost of providing the services. The state office or a local office may waive collection of a fee upon a finding that collection is not economically feasible. The rules may provide that the state office or a local office may investigate the financial status of a ward or client that requests guardianship, conservatorship, or representative payee services or for whom the state public guardian or a local public guardian has been appointed for the purpose of determining the fee to be charged by requiring the ward or client to provide any written authorizations necessary to provide access to records of public or private sources, otherwise confidential, needed to evaluate the individual's financial eligibility. The rules may also provide that the state public guardian or a local public guardian may, upon request and without payment of fees otherwise required by law, obtain information necessary to evaluate the individual's financial eligibility from any office of the state or of a political subdivision or agency of the state that possesses public records.

f. Standards and performance measures for evaluation of local offices.

g. Recordkeeping and accounting procedures to ensure that the state office and local offices maintain confidential, accurate, and up-to-date financial, case, and statistical records. The rules shall require each local office to file with the state office, on an annual basis, an account of all public and private funds received and a report regarding the operations of the local office for the preceding fiscal year.

h. Procedures for the sharing of records held by the court or a state agency with the state office, which are necessary to evaluate the state office or local offices, to assess the need for additional guardians, conservators, or representative payees, or to develop required reports.

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §133; 2009 Acts, ch 23, §44 – 46; 2012 Acts, ch 1023, §30; 2015 Acts, ch 137, §72, 162, 163; 2016 Acts, ch 1139, §49; 2018 Acts, ch 1041, §127; 2018 Acts, ch 1048, §5; 2023 Acts, ch 19, §589](#)

Subsection 3, paragraph e amended

231E.5 Local office of public guardian — requirements for state and local public guardians.

1. The state public guardian shall select persons to provide local public guardianship services, based upon a request for proposals process developed by the department.

2. A local office shall comply with all requirements established for the local office by the department and shall do all of the following:

- a. Maintain a staff of professionally qualified individuals to carry out the guardian, conservator, and representative payee functions.
- b. Identify client needs and local resources to provide necessary support services to recipients of guardianship, conservatorship, and representative payee services.
- c. Collect program data as required by the state office.
- d. Meet standards established for the local office.
- e. Comply with minimum staffing requirements and caseload restrictions.
- f. Conduct background checks on employees and volunteers.
- g. With regard to a proposed ward, the local office shall do all of the following:
 - (1) Determine the most appropriate form of guardianship or conservatorship services needed, if any, giving preference to the least restrictive alternative.
 - (2) Determine whether the needs of the proposed ward require the appointment of a guardian or conservator.
 - (3) Assess the financial resources of the proposed ward based on the information supplied to the local office at the time of the determination.
 - (4) Inquire and, if appropriate, search to determine whether any other person may be willing and able to serve as the proposed ward's guardian or conservator.
 - (5) Determine the form of guardianship or conservatorship to request of a court, if any, giving preference to the least restrictive form.
 - (6) If determined necessary, file a petition for the appointment of a guardian or conservator pursuant to [chapter 633](#).

3. A local office may do any of the following:

- a. Contract for or arrange for provision of services necessary to carry out the duties of a local public guardian.
 - b. Accept the services of volunteers or consultants and reimburse them for necessary expenses.
 - c. Employ staff and delegate to members of the staff the powers and duties of the local public guardian. However, the local office shall retain responsibility for the proper performance of the delegated powers and duties. All delegations shall be to persons who meet the eligibility requirements of the specific type of public guardian.
4. An individual acting as the state public guardian or a local public guardian shall comply with applicable requirements for guardians and conservators pursuant to [chapter 633](#), or representative payees pursuant to federal law and regulations.

5. Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary, an individual acting as the state public guardian or a local public guardian shall not be subject to the posting of a bond pursuant to [chapter 633](#). An individual acting as the state public guardian or a local public guardian shall complete at least eight hours of training annually as certified by the department.

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §134](#); [2018 Acts, ch 1041, §127](#); [2018 Acts, ch 1048, §6](#)

231E.6 Court-initiated or petition-initiated appointment of state or local public guardian — guardianship or conservatorship — discharge.

1. The court may appoint on its own motion or upon petition of any person, the state office or a local office, to serve as guardian or conservator for any proposed ward in cases in which the court determines that the proceeding will establish the least restrictive form of guardianship or conservatorship services suitable for the proposed ward and if the proposed ward meets all of the following criteria:

- a. Is a resident of the service area in which the local office is located from which services would be provided or is a resident of the state, if the state office would provide the services.
- b. Is eighteen years of age or older.
- c. Does not have suitable family or another appropriate entity willing and able to serve as guardian or conservator.
- d. Is incompetent.
- e. Is an individual for whom guardianship or conservatorship services are the least restrictive means of meeting the individual's needs.

2. For all appointments made pursuant to [this section](#), notice shall be provided to the state office or local office prior to appointment. For appointments made pursuant to [this section](#), the state office or local office shall only accept appointments made pursuant to the filing of an involuntary petition for appointment of a conservator or guardianship pursuant to [chapter 633](#).

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §135; 2009 Acts, ch 23, §47; 2018 Acts, ch 1048, §7](#)
Referred to in [§231E.8](#)

231E.7 Public guardian-initiated appointment — interventions.

The state office or local office may on its own motion or at the request of the court intervene in a guardianship or conservatorship proceeding if the state office or local office or the court considers the intervention to be justified because of any of the following:

1. An appointed guardian or conservator is not fulfilling prescribed duties or is subject to removal under [section 633.65](#).
2. A willing and qualified guardian or conservator is not available.
3. The best interests of the ward require the intervention.

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §136; 2009 Acts, ch 23, §48; 2018 Acts, ch 1048, §8](#)
Referred to in [§231E.8](#)

231E.8 Provisions applicable to all appointments and designations — discharge.

1. The court shall only appoint or intervene on its own motion or act upon the petition of any person under [section 231E.6](#) or [231E.7](#) if such appointment or intervention would comply with staffing ratios established by the department and if sufficient resources are available to the state office or local office. Notice of the proposed appointment shall be provided to the state office or local office prior to the granting of such appointment.

2. The state office or local office shall maintain reasonable personal contact with each ward or client for whom the state office or local office is appointed or designated in order to monitor the ward's or client's care and progress.

3. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the state office or local office appointed by the court may access all confidential records concerning the ward for whom the state office or local office is appointed or designated, including medical records and abuse reports.

4. In any proceeding in which the state or a local office is appointed or is acting as guardian or conservator, the court shall waive court costs or filing fees, if the state office or local office certifies to the court that the state office or local office has waived its fees in their entirety based upon the ability of the ward to pay for the services of the state office or local office.

5. The state public guardian or a local public guardian shall be subject to discharge or removal, by the court, on the grounds and in the manner in which other guardians or conservators are discharged or removed pursuant to [chapter 633](#).

6. The state public guardian or a local public guardian may petition to be removed as guardian or conservator. A petition for removal shall be granted for any of the following reasons:

- a. The ward displays assaultive or aggressive behavior that causes the public guardian to fear for their personal safety.
- b. The ward refuses the services of the public guardian.
- c. The ward refuses to have contact with the public guardian.
- d. The ward moves out of Iowa.

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §137; 2009 Acts, ch 23, §49; 2018 Acts, ch 1041, §127; 2018 Acts, ch 1048, §9](#)

231E.9 Fees — appropriated.

Fees received by the state office and by local offices for services provided as the state public guardian or as a local public guardian shall be deposited in the general fund of the state and the amounts received are appropriated to the department for the purposes of administering [this chapter](#).

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §138; 2018 Acts, ch 1048, §10](#)
Referred to in [§231E.4](#)

231E.10 Conflicts of interest — limitations.

Notwithstanding [section 633.63](#) or any other provision to the contrary, a local public guardian shall not provide direct services to or have an actual or the appearance of any conflict of interest relating to any individual for whom the local public guardian acts in the capacity of a guardian, conservator, or representative payee, unless such provision of direct services or the appearance of a conflict of interest is approved and monitored by the state office in accordance with rules adopted by the department.

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §139](#); [2018 Acts, ch 1048, §11](#)

231E.11 Duty of attorney general, county attorney, or other counsel.

1. The attorney general may advise the state office on legal matters and represent the state office in legal proceedings.

2. Upon the request of the attorney general, a county attorney may represent the state office or a local office in connection with the filing of a petition for appointment as guardian or conservator and with routine, subsequent appearances.

3. Notwithstanding [section 13.7](#), the state public guardian or a local public guardian may retain a local attorney to represent the state office or a local office in legal proceedings. A local attorney retained under this subsection shall be experienced in probate matters.

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §140](#); [2018 Acts, ch 1048, §12](#)

231E.12 Liability.

All employees and volunteers of the state office and local offices operating under [this chapter](#) and other applicable chapters and pursuant to rules adopted under this and other applicable chapters are considered employees of the state and state volunteers for the purposes of [chapter 669](#) and shall be afforded protection under [section 669.21](#) or [669.24](#), as applicable. [This section](#) does not relieve a guardian or conservator from performing duties prescribed under [chapter 633](#).

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §141](#)

231E.13 Implementation.

Implementation of [this chapter](#) is subject to availability of funding as determined by the department.

[2005 Acts, ch 175, §142](#); [2015 Acts, ch 30, §75](#)