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Florida guardian suspended amid reports of 'hacker activity,' missing Mercedes, and excessive spending

Judge demands records in 34 cases after scathing audit

For more than a decade, the ABC Action News I-Team exposed problems with Florida's professional guardianship system in our award-winning series "The Price of Protection." Last week, we were there when Collier County professional guardian Kathy Johnson was suspended from more than 30 cases amid allegations of missing money, lost records, and hacked bank accounts. "At best this is mismanagement. At worst it's something more," said Circuit Court Judge Elizabeth Krier.









By: [Adam Walser](#)

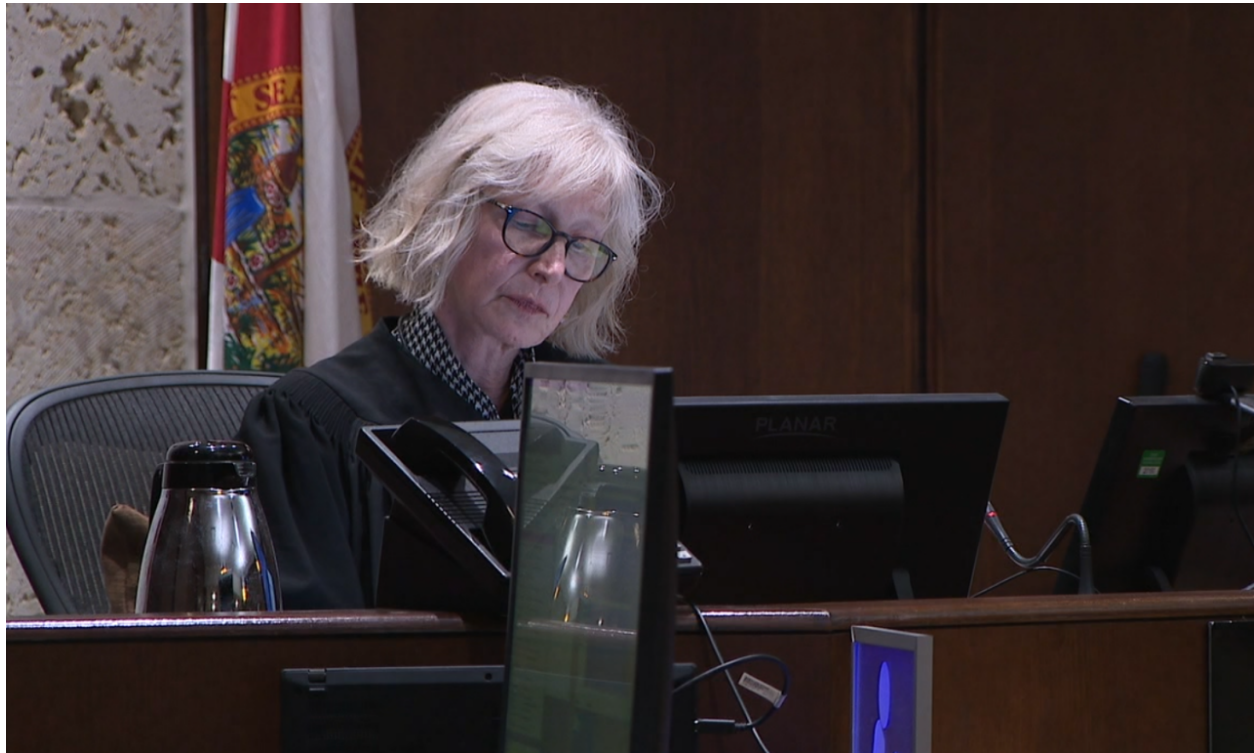
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NAPLES, Fla. — For more than a decade, the ABC Action News I-Team exposed problems with Florida’s professional guardianship system in our award-winning series [“The Price of Protection”](#).

Last week, we were there when Collier County professional guardian [Kathy Johnson](#) was suspended from more than 30 cases amid allegations of missing money, lost records, and hacked bank accounts.

“At best, this is mismanagement. At worst, it’s something more,” said [Circuit Court Judge Elizabeth Krier](#).



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She addressed Johnson and her team of more than half a dozen lawyers at a hearing about how Johnson cared for 34 court-appointed wards and their money.

“I also am not going to allow these wards’ money to be flushed down the toilet for another minute,” Krier said.

“Hacker activity,” missing Mercedes, and excessive spending questioned

Johnson has been a professional guardian for more than two decades, even though she was convicted of driving under the influence twice and declared bankruptcy.

“Numerous complaints were made about Kathy Johnson. And again, they were all unsubstantiated and nothing was done until today. Too little and God knows too late,” said guardianship reform advocate Hillary Hogue, who lives in Collier County.

The Collier County Clerk of Courts, which monitors guardianships, found several irregularities in Johnson's cases.

Those included claims, which the auditor disputed, that three wards lost more than \$85,000 as a result of "hacker activity," which Johnson reported to the Collier County Sheriff's Office.

There were also concerns that a ward's Mercedes Benz didn't appear in an inventory of her assets.

Accounts showed that a ward's bank account shrank by nearly \$609,000 in two years while the woman was in Johnson's care.

Johnson previously told auditors she couldn't produce invoices and other records because they were in storage.

"All the records need to be turned over to the auditors' office. Every single piece of paper," Krier said

Judge Krier also questioned whether some wards should be in guardianship at all, based on shoddy capacity exams she observed in court records.

"I want a real capacity evaluation," Krier said. "I'm not convinced that anybody's seeing anybody in terms of these capacity evaluations."

Ward wrote seven letters complaining about Johnson

85-year-old Bridget Manning was declared incapacitated after she fell, injured her leg, and wound up in a rehab center while visiting a friend.



Carmen Kaouk

Manning wrote seven letters to judges complaining about Johnson, begging to get her rights back and hoping to return to her native Ireland.

"My intention was to get Johnson out. She did a lot of things to a lot of people," Manning said.

Johnson moved Manning to a small home care facility in rural Lehigh Acres, in another county more than 50 miles from the Collier County Courthouse.

That facility was recently cited by the state for its "staff not having proper medical training and certification".

When asked to describe her living situation, Manning replied, "Bad. Very Bad."

"I have to share a room. Kathy Johnson got both of us in there," Manning said.

Please remove her as soon as possible,
I never broke a law in U.S.A and
that is a good record.

Everything I wrote is the truth.
The State is keeping me from
my country.

Ireland takes good care of Americans,
lots of business and lots of stores in
Ireland from U.S.A. Also lots of Americans
working in Ireland.

Budget M. Manning

Collier County Court Records

Johnson's two wards share a tiny room in the 1,400 square foot home.

The women also share a single bathroom with two disabled men who live there.

"This is a very far place for her. She doesn't like to come at all," Manning said.

A clerk's affidavit indicated Johnson may have violated Florida's guardianship law by not making required quarterly visits to the facility.



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56-year-old registered nurse placed in guardianship

“I was employed as a registered nurse. I was working two jobs,” Karen Federighi said, describing her situation when she was placed in guardianship in 2016 at age 56.

Federighi inherited money after the death of her stepfather and her estranged sisters from Illinois hired an attorney to petition to have her placed in guardianship and stripped of all her rights.

She says a court-appointed committee conducted brief mental exams.

“It was a retired Hospice nurse evaluating me at a McDonalds,” Federighi said. “And then the other two individuals to evaluate me were a retired 80-year-old OBGYN and an activities director at a skilled nursing facility.”

Federighi secretly shot a video of a conversation with Johnson 265 days into her guardianship in 2016.

“How come you’re billing hundreds of dollars for phone calls?” Federighi asked.

“Because that’s what I do, Karen,” Johnson responded. “That’s how guardianships work.”

Karen lived alone at a La Quinta Inn but didn’t have access to her money.



Karen Federighi

“When I needed food, oh I wasn’t allowed to go to the store myself and buy it. She had to drive me,” Federighi said.

We found bills in Federighi’s court file in which Johnson was paid \$90 an hour to take her to Publix, Walmart, and the pharmacy.

Ward lived on the lam using burner phones and cash

With the help of guardianship reform advocates she met on Facebook, Karen escaped guardianship in Southwest Florida and fled to California.

“I literally lived on the lam for nearly a year using burner phones and cash,” Federighi said.

An “angel donor” regularly wired Federighi money at Western Union sites to help her stay hidden.

A California lawyer hired by a supporter was able to get Federighi’s guardianship transferred to Los Angeles County where it was later overturned.

But not before she lost everything she had before the process started.

“I was living in a condo, and I had a car,” Federighi said.

She said that wasn’t all she lost. “All gone. All my photographs, my Bibles, furniture, my pets. Everything gone,” she said.

“They treat them like they’re non-people”

Johnson was also the guardian of Rosalie Ziegler.

“There was no caring for my mother,” said her daughter Carmon Kaouk.

The guardianship was initiated as a voluntary guardianship as a result of a dispute between Kaouk and her siblings.

But Kaouk says she wasn’t allowed to talk to her 98-year-old mother in the months before she died.

She says she found out about her mother’s death from a text message.

“They would not tell me where she was, and they said there was not going to be any funeral. They told me she was already cremated,” Kaouk said.

Kaouk and Hillary Hogue called around to funeral homes and were able to locate Ziegler’s body before it was cremated.

Kaouk flew from North Carolina to say her final goodbye, finding her mother in a cardboard box.

“It’s heartbreaking because they treat them like they’re non-people. Like they’re not important. Money is what’s important,” Kaouk said.

20-GA-23

July 16, 2022

Judge Elizabeth Kier
3315 Tamiami Trail East #401
Naples, FL 34112

My name is Budget Henning and
Kathy Johnson is my Guardian.

Collier County Court Records

Johnson remains silent

After the hearing, we tried to ask Johnson about the allegations surrounding her suspension and the concerns of her wards and their families.

One of her attorneys repeatedly responded “no comment” as Johnson covered her face with a large envelope without responding to our questions.

Johnson’s wards’ bank accounts have all been frozen and her wards have been assigned emergency temporary guardians.

The clerk’s office has requested that the judge refer cases in which crimes may have occurred to law enforcement.

If you have a story you’d like the I-Team to investigate, email us at adam@abcactionnews.com