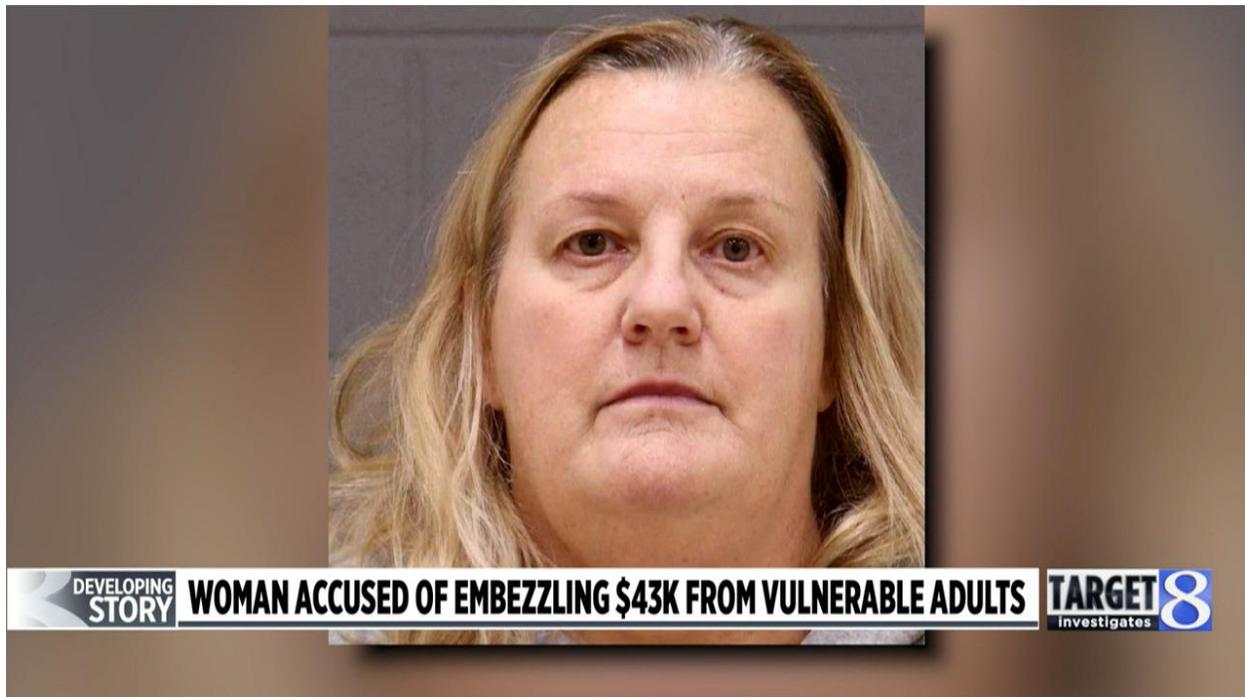


**'Neglect,' 'exploitation' by Kent County guardian prompt criminal enterprise charge, *Susan Samples*, (Jan 7, 2025)**

<https://www.woodtv.com/news/target-8/neglect-exploitation-by-kent-county-guardian-prompt-criminal-enterprise-charge/>

**'Neglect,' 'exploitation' by Kent County guardian prompt criminal enterprise charge**



**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) — A joint investigation by detectives in Grand Rapids, Walker and Kent County uncovered a public guardian’s “wide-ranging scheme” to exploit vulnerable adults, according to court records.**

**Kimberley St. Onge, who served as a guardian through Kent County Probate Court, is charged with conducting a criminal enterprise, a 20-year-felony, and embezzlement from a vulnerable adult more than \$1,000 but less than \$20,000.**

**“St. Onge, acting as a legal guardian for multiple individuals, systematically diverted funds meant to support the basic needs of vulnerable adults,” a Grand Rapids detective wrote in a probable cause affidavit filed Dec. 17 in 61st District Court. “Across all cases, St. Onge exhibited a clear and deliberate pattern of financial exploitation, commingling funds, and neglecting her legal and moral responsibilities as a guardian.”**

**The complaint lists 12 alleged victims and/or complainants who lost a total of \$43,650 in amounts that ranged from \$2,351 to \$12,968.**

However, in an initial fraud case filed in May, a detective reported that Kent County's guardianship program, which investigated promptly when allegations surfaced, estimated St. Onge's "mass embezzlement" could surpass \$100,000.

According to the December affidavit, St. Onge allegedly cashed her wards' federal supplemental security income checks at nonbank locations, including Walmart and a liquor store, before depositing them into her own accounts and using them for personal expenses, like gas and hotel stays.

In multiple cases, the detective went on to write, there was no evidence that the wards' funds were used to pay their housing costs or personal expenses.

In the affidavit filed in May, another Grand Rapids detective reported that checks fraudulently cashed on a ward's bank account were made out to St. Onge's son and mother.

"This affiant is aware of five checks which were written between 04/02/24 and 05/05/24 that were not authorized payments for legitimate purposes on behalf of (one of St. Onge's wards)," wrote the Grand Rapids detective in the May case, "These checks totaled \$2,400."

A friend of the alleged victim in that case noticed suspicious activity on her friend's bank account, notified probate court and helped the ward file a report with the Grand Rapids Police Department.

"I first saw a check come through for \$600 to some name I never heard of and then several others," the friend told Target 8 in an interview at her northwest Grand Rapids home, "and then another \$300 and another \$300, and they weren't things we'd normally pay."

Target 8 is identifying the ward's friend by her first name only, Joann, to maintain her privacy. She was conducting a living room Bible study when Target 8 knocked on her door.

"Every day I wake up and I ask God to give me wisdom," she explained.

Fittingly, it was Joann's desire to serve that exposed a woman who, according to police, served only herself. Joann had previously managed the finances of a woman with special needs she met at church.

"I knew (she) was struggling with her finance situation and there was no family available to help her so I stepped in and told her I would pay her bills for her," explained Joann, who's 83. "So my name got put on her checking account, so it was easier to do. Then one day, I decided I was getting older and I should probably turn this over to someone younger."

**That's when Joann and her friend sought a guardian through Kent County Probate Court and ended up with Kimberly St. Onge.**

**What St. Onge may not have realized was that Joann was still receiving notifications from her friend's bank account.**

**"I first saw the check come through for \$600," Joann told Target 8. "And then (the ward's) rent wasn't getting paid, nor her utilities."**

**Joann and her friend filed a report with GRPD and notified Kent County Probate Court.**

**"I kind of presumed that (there) was more than one (victim)," Joann recalled. "If (St. Onge) had clients, she wouldn't just do it to one. So that was kind of the reason we decided we'd report it, to help save others, too. There was no other way to go. It had to be done."**

**Joann thought her friend's affairs would be well-managed.**

**"I turned it over to the state," Joann said. "She should have been in good hands."**

**Michigan's Elder Abuse Task Force, convened in 2019 by Attorney General Dana Nessel, has been working to reform guardianship and conservator laws to better protect vulnerable people.**

**"There really hasn't been uniform requirements throughout the state," J. Dee Brooks, Midland County prosecutor and a task force member, said. "That's what we're really looking to do... to make (the system) more structured, to have a process where those individuals would be required to be certified by the state so we can make sure they have the necessary qualifications and also so they could be monitored."**

**The task force has made progress in some areas, enacting the Financial Exploitation Act and creating a Vulnerable Adult Incident Report Form.**

**But a [package of additional reform bills](#) has so far failed to make it to a full vote of the Legislature.**

**"I think what happened was there was some pushback from the professional organizations (that represent conservators and guardianships)," Brooks explained in an interview with Target 8 via Zoom. "They were concerned it would involve over-regulation."**

**But the task force is not giving up the fight for reform.**

**The AG's office reports that more than 73,000 older adults in Michigan are victims of elder abuse. If you're seeking resources or you've experienced or witnessed elder abuse, you're urged to call 800.24.ABUSE (22873) or 855.444.3911.**

**According to an affidavit filed in 61st District Court, when allegations surfaced against St. Onge in May, Kent County's Guardianship Program began a review and "found clear evidence of fraud, and commingling of finances."**

**"Judge (David M.) Murkowski has issued an order to freeze all bank accounts belonging to Kimberly St. Onge," a detective wrote in one of the affidavits.**

**Kalie Gascho, probate court register and administrator, declined comment regarding St. Onge due to the ongoing criminal case. Gascho did, however, confirm that the court runs criminal history, central registry and credit checks on all potential guardians. She also said St. Onge began serving as a guardian on May 16, 2023, and was terminated on May 21, 2024.**

**Court records show the alleged embezzlement occurred from June 1, 2023, to May 2024.**

**St. Onge, 56, has a clean criminal record in Michigan outside of a 2012 impaired driving conviction, according to the criminal database maintained by state police.**

**Federal court records show St. Onge, who most recently listed a home address in Zeeland, filed for bankruptcy twice more than 10 years ago.**

**She's currently in the Kent County jail in lieu of a \$10,000 bond. Her next court appearance is scheduled for Jan. 14.**

**St. Onge declined a jail visit with Target 8 and her defense attorney declined comment, explaining that she had been assigned to the case the same day Target 8 inquired about it.**