Submitted Written Testimony of Ms. Marie Bergum

Resident of California

Supported Decision-Making as an Alternative to Conservatorship

For the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution

"Toxic Conservatorships: The Need for Reform"

Hearing September 28, 2021

Figure 1 Marie Bergum and Aunt Nancy Bergum

Figure 2 Buzzfeed: Marie Bergum, Attorney Lisa Hutar and Advocate Suzanne Bennett Francisco

Please fix the court system to help people with disabilities like me to live with a choice, a voice, supporters and with the human and civil rights we deserve

- ***instead of feeling trapped and hopeless in a lifelong conservatorship.***

My name is Marie Bergum. I am 36 years old and live in Ventura, California.

When my dad was my conservator, I wanted a job, but he said no. I wanted to go to an independent living program, but he said no. I wanted to live in California, where my friends and services are, and he tried to make me move to Michigan. I wanted an advocate to come to my support plan meeting, but he said no. I wanted to learn how to use the public bus system, but he said no. I wanted a lawyer to fight for my rights, but the court appointed lawyer wouldn't. I wished the judge had listened to me and the witnesses for my team, but he didn't.

I finally found friends and lawyers who would fight for me, and a judge who listened to us. They helped me get my dad removed as my conservator. Now I have people who work with me to use supported decisions making to make my own decisions with help.

Now I call my team when I need help to budget my money, make medical decisions, or get advice about work or relationships. Now, I live where I want and take the independent living class that my Dad wouldn't let me take. I want to be an advocate and help others like me. I hope my story lets people know that conservatorship isn't the only choice and isn't always the right one.

Please fix the courts to help people with disabilities like me - to live with a choice, a voice, supporters and with our rights.

\- Ms. Marie Bergum

This written testimony is the transcript of submitted video testimony.

For more information about Marie's story, please see:

Buzzfeed: "'My Human Rights are Being Violated': Fighting A Family Conservatorship."