My name is Victoria Vermillion. I am the mother of Kalei Bulwinkle.

I originally thought I needed guardianship and conservatorship to be able to help my daughter make financial and health decisions. I was never advised that there were other ways to help her.

The first sign that I made a mistake was a year after Kalei's initial hearing. I was turning in her yearly financial report. The judge told me that I let Kalei spend her money on anything and everything. I was also told that Kalei could not participate in writing checks or using a debit card. It clearly states in the Conservator handbook that I am to "encourage the ward to participate in decisions, act on the ward's own behalf, and develop or regain the ability to manage the ward's property." This is what I thought I was supposed to do. I do not know if the judge was on a power trip or did not like me questioning the guidance I was given. The judge finally told me that we just needed to work on getting Kalei her rights back. I know at this point my daughter needed her rights back. Kalei was doing more and achieving more than I ever thought she would. It's not that I didn't think she could, I just knew it might take her a little more time than others her age.

The judge scheduled a hearing, and we met with a doctor of the judge's choosing. The judge would not accept anything from Kalei's doctor since I was advised by the court that he was not qualified to make the decision for Kalei to get her rights back. How can a medical doctor who met with her every three months not be qualified? When Kalei did meet with the court appointed doctor, he advised me that I should look into putting my daughter in Warm Springs. I got really frustrated at this point since my daughter was driving to and from a community college everyday and made Dean's List several times. The judge and the court appointed doctor were so focused on her IQ, and not what my child could do. I was beyond frustrated. On the day of the hearing, Kalei and I were never contacted by the court appointed guardian ad litem. After the judge told me she was sorry since my daughter had a low IQ and that she was keeping everything the same, I asked where my daughter's attorney was. I was beyond frustrated. Not only was my daughter not being treated like a human, but she was also not being given the legal rights that were supposed to be given to her. The hearing was postponed until a lawyer and a new doctor to evaluate my daughter could be appointed. That afternoon, I contacted the Georgia Advocacy Office.

Fast forwarding to now, it was a long and frustrating fight to prove my daughter needed her rights. I had been held in contempt twice and had been threated to be put in jail. All this did not matter to me; I just wanted my daughter's freedom. This is probably a mother's worst nightmare.

I look back now and can't believe how easy it really was to get guardianship and conservatorship over my daughter. All I needed to do was convince a doctor and a guardian ad litem why I felt she needed a guardian and conservator. They never spoke with Kalei one on one.

I would like to ask that you make it more difficult for someone to obtain guardianship and conservatorship. I now know that there are other options. I feel that supported decision making should be the very first consideration when considering guardianship and conservatorship over a person. The latter should be a last and final choice. I also ask that you educate elected judges who do not have a law background. I feel that we would have never had this much difficulty if the judge had a legal background.