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# Colorado Office of Public Guardianship

## Commissioners

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## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
October 7, 2019

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### **The Office of Public Guardianship Commission Appoints Sophia M. Alvarez for the Director of the Office of Public Guardianship**

DENVER - The Colorado Office of Public Guardianship Commission announces that it has appointed Sophia M. Alvarez as the Director for the Office of Public Guardianship. The Commission voted to appoint Ms. Alvarez on September 25, 2019. Ms. Alvarez has now formally accepted the position following her successful completion of a criminal background check and financial credit report. Ms. Alvarez assumes her duties as Director on October 21, 2019.

Since 2016, Ms. Alvarez has been employed in the Nebraska Office of Public Guardian, where she served as an Associate Public Guardian and its Legal Counsel. Her knowledge and experience in working in a statewide public guardian office will be an asset to Colorado's public guardianship pilot program. Throughout her career, Ms. Alvarez has demonstrated a commitment to using her law degree to serve and assist vulnerable people in her prior work at the Center for Legal Immigration Assistance and Legal Aid, both in Nebraska. Her dedication to public service extends to her community involvement serving on the Board of Directors for organizations such as Disability Rights, El Centro de las Americas, and the YWCA. "Joining the Colorado Office of Public Guardianship Pilot Program allows me to continue my pursuit of fundamental fairness and equality for vulnerable populations. In particular, my experience with the Nebraska Office of Public Guardian highlights the importance of safeguarding the rights and needs of individuals entering into, and under, guardianships," Ms. Alvarez said.

Ms. Alvarez received her undergraduate degree in biology from Texas Women's University where she graduated magna cum laude. She also obtained a Master of Science and her Juris Doctorate from the University of Nebraska. Ms. Alvarez also received extensive training in mediation from the Nebraska Mediation Center Association.

The Commission is excited to begin working with Ms. Alvarez and has confidence that her experience, consummate professionalism, and energy will be a credit to the new independent pilot program. Deb Bennett-Woods, the Commission chairperson, said: "On behalf of the Commission I want to extend our congratulations and full confidence that Ms. Alvarez, with her experience in the Nebraska Office of Public Guardian and her commitment to those among us who are most vulnerable, will be an asset in establishing the pilot program and beginning to address the pressing need for a public guardian option here in Colorado."

Ms. Alvarez, with cooperation and oversight by the Commission, is charged with the important task of developing the public guardianship pilot program in the Second Judicial District by establishing the necessary administrative infrastructure for the Office, hiring personnel, and delivering guardianship services to mentally incapacitated and indigent adults who meet the eligibility requirements. Ms. Alvarez will work with stakeholders, relevant state agencies, the courts, and public and private entities to make the pilot program successful and fulfill the goal of expanding operations into additional Judicial Districts. "I'm thankful for the opportunity to serve as the Director. I look forward to working with various stakeholders in establishing and expanding the Colorado Office of Public Guardianship Pilot Program," Ms. Alvarez said.

The Commission received numerous applications for this position, and it extends its appreciation to all the candidates who applied. Specifically, the Commission recognizes Ford Allison, also selected as a finalist, and thanks him for his interest.

The Colorado General Assembly created the Office of Public Guardianship Commission and Office within the Judicial Department. § 13-94-104(1), C.R.S. (2017). The Commission comprises 5 members. Three of the members are appointed by the Colorado Supreme Court, of which two must be attorneys admitted to practice law in Colorado and one must be a resident of Colorado not admitted to practice law. The remaining two members are appointed by the Governor, one who must be an attorney admitted to practice law in this state and one who must be a resident of Colorado not admitted to practice law.

The Commission was charged under the legislation to appoint the Director for the Office of Public Guardianship, who serves at the pleasure of the Commission. § 13-94-104(3), C.R.S. (2019). The OPG Office/Commission is a pilot program initially operating in the Second Judicial District and subsequently the Seventh and Sixteenth Judicial Districts conditional upon securing additional funding effective until June 30, 2023. At that time, the agency will either continue, discontinue, or be expanded by the General Assembly. § 13-94-111, C.R.S. (2019).

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