

Protect Yourself From a Legal Nightmare

A professional guardian can take control of your health, wealth, and everyday decisions. Act now to stay safe.



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For many people, retirement is a time of long-awaited freedom. Gone are the constraints of bosses and the needs of children, and a lifetime of careful savings provides a passport to travel, fun with friends, and limitless choices.

Sure, retirement age often comes with some aches and pains or more significant health conditions, but each person is free to choose how to accommodate those conditions in the way they best see fit.

At least that's what hundreds of people believed before they met April Parks, professional guardian and master con artist. It turns out there is a terrifying loophole in the legal system that allows a complete stranger to take control over every aspect of your life if you're deemed to be unable to care for yourself. If you think that means something as serious as being in a coma, think again. Parks's victims lost everything—from their life savings to their very freedom—for issues as simple as being falsely accused of having dementia.

Bottom Line Health spoke with Rebecca Strub, Esq., to find out how you can make sure this never happens to you or your loved ones.

April Parks case

First, let's take a look at how April Parks took advantage of people who didn't have some simple legal documents in place. Parks and her accomplices sought out seniors who had both a history of some kind of medical condition, not necessarily a severe one, and assets that she could

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While you can't eliminate the risk of incapacity, you can use estate planning to ensure that you have some control over how your life and assets will be managed if it ever does occur.

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seize. She then used a legal maneuver called *ex parte* that allowed her to go before a judge and request emergency temporary guardianship over a person—without informing that person or his or her family.

Her medical claims were dubious, but she always won, and temporary guardianship invariably became permanent.

Parks and her associates would promptly show up at her new ward's home, with no advance notice, and force the unwitting person to hastily pack so she could move him or her to an assisted living facility. She would then plunder the home, seizing personal belongings and assets, and selling everything of value her ward owned.

Parks prevented her wards from seeing or speaking to their families, and billed the estates outlandish fees—enriching herself while providing the bare minimum for her wards. Assisted living workers reported that they could always tell which residents were under her care because of how poorly they were dressed. She refused to give them their own clothes or release their funds to buy new ones. Parks defrauded and terrorized more than 150 people before she was finally stopped and sentenced to prison in 2017.

What guardians can legally do

While Parks's extreme abuses and self-enrichment led to her downfall,