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INFORMATIONAL LETTER

TRANSMITTAL: 91 INF-40

DIVISION: Adult Services

TO: Commissioners of  
 Social Services

DATE: August 19, 1991

SUBJECT: Protective Services for Adults: Clarification of  
 Article 77 of the Mental Hygiene Law Relating to the  
 Powers of Conservators to Make Placement Decisions  
 (In the Matter of Grinker v. Rose, State of New York  
 Court of Appeals)

SUGGESTED

DISTRIBUTION: Directors of Services  
 Adult Services Staff  
 Agency Attorneys  
 Staff Development Coordinators

CONTACT PERSON: Any questions concerning this release should be  
 directed to your district's Adult Services  
 Representative at 1-800-342-3715 as follows:  
 Irvin Abelman ext. 432-2980 or (212) 804-1247  
 Kathleen Crowe ext. 432-2996  
 Michael Monahan ext. 432-2864  
 Janet Morrissey ext. 432-2997

ATTACHMENTS: None

FILING REFERENCES

Previous ADMs/INFs	Releases Cancelled	Dept. Regs.	Soc. Serv. Law & Other Legal Ref.	Manual Ref.	Misc. Ref.
88 ADM-23		457	473		
			Articles 77 and 78 of the Mental Hygiene Law		

The purpose of this transmittal is to advise local social services districts of a recent decision by the State of New York Court of Appeals which affects the powers of conservators appointed under Article 77 of the Mental Hygiene Law (MHL) to make placement decisions on behalf of conservatees.

Article 77 of the MHL sets forth the provisions for the designation of a conservator for the property of a person who has not been declared incompetent by a court but who "by reason of advanced age, illness, infirmity, mental weakness, alcohol abuse, addiction to drugs, or other cause has suffered impairment of his ability to care for his property or has become unable to provide for himself or others dependent upon him for support." The primary duties of a conservator are to preserve, maintain and care for the proposed conservatee's income and assets. In accordance with Section 77.19 of the MHL, the court must, however, approve a plan for the conservator to provide for the conservatee's well-being, including the provision of necessary personal and social protective services to the conservatee. A number of courts have broadly interpreted this section of Article 77 and have granted additional powers to a conservator, including the right to make placement decisions on behalf of a conservatee.

In a recent decision, In the Matter of Grinker v. Rose, the State of New York Court of Appeals concluded that Article 77 of the MHL was enacted to preserve the property of persons who are unable to manage their own affairs. The court concluded that Section 77.19 of the MHL was intended to authorize a grant of limited power over a conservatee's person incidentally related to the primary power over property. The court unanimously ruled that Article 77 of the MHL cannot be utilized to make placement decisions for conservatees. The court concluded that Section 77.19 "clearly does not authorize the potent personal transformation of involuntary commitment of a conservatee to a nursing home.... The availability of such a significant involuntary displacement of personal liberty should be confined to a Mental Hygiene Law article 78 incompetency proceeding, with its full panoply of procedural due process safeguards...."

Based on the Court of Appeals decision, any local social services district which seeks authority for the appointment of a guardian empowered to make placement decisions for a mentally impaired person will no longer be able to utilize Article 77 of the MHL. Instead, the local district will have to initiate incompetency proceedings under Article 78 of the MHL.

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William E. Gould  
Acting Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Adult Services