

**THE
AD LITEM MANUAL
2020**

**FOR
GUARDIANSHIP & HEIRSHIP PROCEEDINGS
IN
TEXAS PROBATE COURTS**

**22ND ANNUAL ESTATE PLANNING, GUARDIANSHIP
AND
ELDER LAW CONFERENCE**

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GUARDIANSHIP
(From the Ad Litem's Perspective)

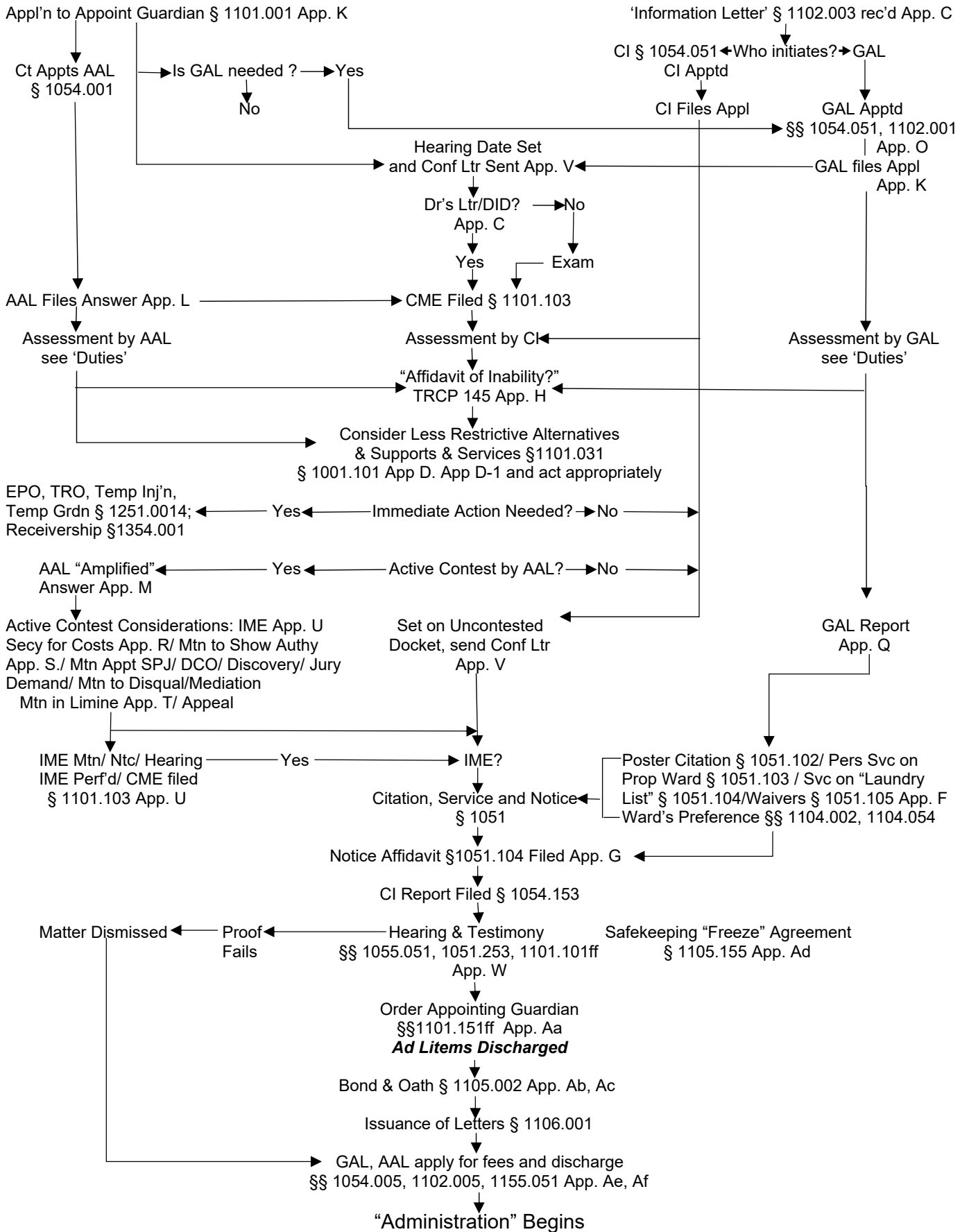


TABLE OF CONTENTS

GUARDIANSHIP (From the Ad Litem’s Perspective)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
I. INTRODUCTION	7
A. Initial Query: Why Should the Judge Care?.....	7
<i>Judicial Bonds</i>	7
B. Certification Requirements	7
C. Liability and Immunity	8
II. AREAS IN WHICH AD LITEMS ARE APPOINTED BY SPECIFIC STATUTE.....	8
A. Appointment of a Guardian.....	8
B. Restoration/Modification of Guardianship- Attorney Ad Litem.....	9
C. Removal of Community Administrator – Attorney Ad Litem	9
D. Heirship Determinations – Attorney Ad Litem.....	9
E. Disclaimers – Guardian Ad Litem	9
F. Probate of Will After Four Years – Attorney Ad Litem	9
G. Partition Actions – Guardian Ad Litem	9
H. Trust Construction or Modification Actions – Guardian Ad Litem.....	9
I. Mental Health Commitments – Attorney Ad Litem.....	10
J. Purchase of Estate Property by Guardian – Attorney Ad Litem	10
K. Sale of Minor’s Interest in Property	10
L. Sports and Entertainment Contracts Entered Into by Minors– Guardian Ad Litem	10
M. Inspection by Guardian of Ward’s Estate Planning Documents – Guardian Ad Litem.....	10
N. Show Cause and Compliance Actions – Guardian Ad Litem and Attorney Ad Litem.....	10
O. Proper Investment by Guardian – Guardian Ad Litem	10
P. Establishment of Pooled Trust Subaccount – Attorney Ad Litem	10
Q. Final Settlement of Guardianship Estate - Attorney Ad Litem	10
R. Judicial Bypass Proceedings– Guardian Ad Litem and Attorney Ad Litem.....	10
S. Family Code Appointments - Guardian Ad Litem and Attorney Ad Litem.....	10
T. “Utility Outfielder” Appointments - Attorney Ad Litem	10
U. “Utility Outfielder” Appointments - Guardian Ad Litem	11
III. EMBRACE THE TECHNOLOGY	11
A. Electronic Resources	11
B. E-Filing & E-Notice.....	11
IV. A to Z FOR AD LITEMS IN GUARDIANSHIP PROCEEDINGS.....	11
A. Study this Manual	11
B. Guardianship Summary.....	11
C. Can You Get There From Where You Are?.....	11
D. Mechanics of Appointment: The Ad Litem Wheel.....	11
E. The Language of Guardianship: Less Restrictive Alternatives & Supports and Services	12
F. Local Rules.....	13
G. Standing Orders.....	13
H. What Documents to Expect.....	13
I. Fundamentally Understand Your Role.....	13
<i>MAJOR CAVEAT: Scope of Appointment</i>	13
Notes on Medical Records.....	13
1. The Role of the Attorney Ad Litem	13
A. Legal Counsel	13
B. The Prime Directive	13
C. “ <i>But I don’t want a guardian</i> ”	13
D. Duties.....	14
2. The Role of the Guardian Ad Litem.....	14
A. Defined	14
B. Personal Representative	14
C. Assess & Recommend	14
D. Duties: Jiminy Cricket or Quarterback?	14

E. Additional Duties	15
J. Is Immediate Action Required?.....	16
K. Temporary Guardianships	16
L. AAL: File an Answer	17
M. Investigate: Finding the Black Box	17
N. Assess Capacity.....	17
Mandated Abuse Reporting	19
O. Independent Medical Exam.....	19
P. The Ad Litem’s Dilemma	19
Q. Is the Application Timely Filed?.....	19
R. Who Picks Up the Tab? – Statement of Inability	20
First Responder and Veterans Exception.....	20
V. MEDICAL RECORDS	20
A. Federal and State Confidentiality Laws	20
B. The Physician’s Certificate of Medical Examination.....	21
1. Basics: Incapacitated Proposed Ward	21
2. Modification and /or Restoration: CME to consider Supports and Services.....	22
3. Basics: Intellectually Disabled Potential Ward	22
4. Independent Medical Exam.....	22
5. Evidentiary Considerations	22
6. Maintenance of Guardianship Orders by Care Facilities	23
7. Defensive Considerations: The Answer May Depend on Who You Ask	23
VII. DEALING WITH THE COURT AND COURT PERSONNEL/ PREPARING FOR HEARING.....	24
A. Your Best Allies.....	24
B. Settings.....	24
C. Working the File	25
D. Ad Litem Reports	25
E. Citation and Notice: A Jurisdictional Foundation and the Laundry List.....	25
F. Getting Ahead of the Curve: Registration, Background Checks and Training	28
G. “Paperwork” to Have on Hand.....	29
H. The Proposed Order: Powers of the Guardian/ Limitations of the Ward	31
Digital Assets.....	31
I. Appointment of Resident Agent.....	31
J. Copies.....	31
VIII. HEARING DAY: SOME GENERAL AND PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS	32
A. General Comments and Decorum	32
B. The Hearing at the Bench.....	32
C. Burden(s) of Proof.....	33
D. Bench Instructions and Mandatory Training.....	33
E. Contested Hearings (with a Court Reporter).....	33
F. Trainwrecks	33
G. Clerk’s Follow-Up Duties	33
H. Say the Words, Take the Money, Go Home.....	34
I. Selling the Follow-Through	34
IX. ACTIVE CONTEST OF THE APPLICATION	34
Threshold Consideration	34
A. File an Answer!	35
B. Determine If Immediate Action is Necessary	35
C. Set the Hearing on the Contested Docket.....	35
D. Calling for Backup	35
E. Retained Counsel	35
F. Request a Statutory Probate Judge	36
G. Intervention by ‘Interested Person’	36
H. Consider Seeking Security for Costs.....	36
I. Jury Demand	38

J.	Pursue Adequate Discovery	39
K.	Advocate for Mediation	39
L.	Shutting the Gate: TROs, Temporary Guardianships, Notices of Lis Pendens & Receivers	39
M.	“Interesting Challenge” – Interest for Standing vs. Adverse Interest	40
N.	Challenging the Applicant – Disqualification	40
	Criminal Background Checks/ Registration & Database	41
O.	If Advantageous – Try to Have Your Client Appear at the Hearing	41
P.	Consider Requesting a Closed Hearing	41
Q.	The Order: Negotiate a Tactical Retreat	41
	Disclosure Requirement: Right to Physical Possession of Ward	41
R.	An Appealing Thought?	41
S.	Potential Ancillary Litigation	42
T.	More Practice Pointers	42
X.	FEE CONSIDERATIONS	42
A.	Introduction	42
B.	Basic Premise	42
C.	Burden of Proof	42
D.	Question of Fact	43
E.	Reasonableness	43
F.	Guidelines, Not Elements	43
G.	Evidence Required	43
H.	Expert Testimony	43
I.	No “Bonus” Factors	44
J.	No Prior Objections Required	44
K.	Limited Duties	44
L.	Non-Compensable Activities	44
M.	Going It Alone	44
N.	Fee Applications	45
O.	County-Pay Cases	45
P.	Private Pay Cases	45
Q.	Hourly Rates	45
R.	Expenses	45
S.	Do Not Bill For:	45
T.	When to File	45
U.	What to Do with the Fee Application	46
V.	Separate Order	46
W.	Specific Areas of Concern on Fee Applications	46
XI.	HEIRSHIP PROCEEDINGS	46
XII.	CLOSING THOUGHTS	46
A.	Removal of an Ad Litem	46
B.	Re-Activation of the Ad Litem	47
C.	Changing Hats – Make an Appearance	47
D.	(Yet More) Practice Pointers	48
E.	<u>Real</u> Continuing Education	48
F.	Think About Your Client	48
	<i>John Stewart: Last Week Tonight June 3, 2018 – Watch it!</i>	48

APPENDICES:

A.	Guardianship Summary	49
B.	Policy for Court-Initiated Guardianships	52
C.	Information Letter & Physician’s Certificate of Medical Exam (with DID)	54
D.	Less Restrictive Alternatives to Guardianship	61
D-1.	Supports & Services.....	71
E.	Investigator’s Checklist	72
F.	Waiver of Citation, Consent to Appointment & Request for Notification.....	73
G.	Affidavit Regarding Notice under § 1051.104(b).....	74
H.	Statement of Inability to Afford Payment of Court Costs or an Appeal Bond	75
I.	Application for Temporary Guardianship/ Fiat for Hearing	77
J.	Proof of Facts (Temporary Guardianship).....	81
K.	Order Appointing Temporary Guardian	82
L.	Application for Appointment of a Guardian of the Person (and Estate).....	85
M.	Original Answer (Attorney Ad Litem).....	87
N.	Original Answer (“Contest”)	88
O.	Application & Order for Authority to Utilize Attorneys and Staff of Appointee’s Law Firm	89
P.	Motion for Appointment of Guardian Ad Litem and Order	92
Q.	Entry of Appearance of Guardian Ad Litem.....	94
R.	Report of Guardian Ad Litem	95
S.	Motion for Security for Costs & Order	96
T.	Motion to Show Authority, Show Cause Citation & Order	98
U.	Motion in Limine and to Dismiss Application.....	101
V.	Motion for Independent Medical Examination, Fiat & Order	102
W.	Handout: Registration, Criminal History Background Checks and Training	104
X.	Setting Confirmation.....	105
Y.	Proof of Facts (Guardianship).....	106
Z.	Exhibit: Evidence in Support of Requested Bond	107
Aa.	Exhibit: Evidence in Support of Requested Monthly Allowance	108
Ab.	Suggested Cross-Examination Questions for the Ad Litem	109
Ac.	Order Appointing Guardian of the Person (and Estate)	110
Ad.	Personal Surety Bond.....	114
Ae.	Oath of Guardian.....	115
Af.	Safekeeping (“Freeze”) Agreement (Pre-Appointment).....	116
Ag.	Fee Application & Order - County Pay (“Set Fee”)	117
Ah.	Fee Application & Order – Private or County Pay in Excess of Set Fee.....	118
Ai.	Practice Tips from the Probate Court One Investigators	120
Aj.	Court Instructions: Guardian of the Person/ Guardian of the Estate (English/Spanish)	121
Ak.	Ward’s Bill of Rights (English/Spanish) & Information to Be Furnished.....	131
Al.	Initial Report of the Guardian of the Person	134

The Ad Litem Manual 2018

I. INTRODUCTION:

GOALS: To help the reader to become familiar with:

1. the types of proceedings in which ad litem may be appointed;
2. the varying roles of the ad litem in different proceedings;
3. fulfilling the responsibilities of an attorney ad litem or guardian ad litem in the different proceedings;
4. how to before the bench and in dealing with court personnel; and
5. some specifics on fee applications.

This manual deal primarily with the uncontested aspects of a guardianship and only briefly with contests.

For more information on guardianship litigation, see:

1. State Bar of Texas Seminars on:
 - Advanced Estate Planning and Probate (Litigation Breakout Section)
 - Advanced Guardianship Course
 - Fiduciary Litigation Course
2. Tarrant County Probate Bar Association Probate Litigation Seminar in Fort Worth (every other fall).

For a very insightful commentary on dealing with ad litem, see Hopper, Craig, *Call in the Sheriff: Handling Overzealous Ad Litem and Other Outlaws*, 2010 Advanced Guardianship Course, State Bar of Texas. For an excellent discussion of the responsibilities of ad litem in areas outside of guardianship, see Smith, Dani D., *Attorney Ad Litem and Guardian ad Litem: An Overview of the Roles and Liabilities in Non-Guardianship Cases*, 2018 Advanced Estate Planning and Probate Course, State Bar of Texas.

A. Initial Query: Why Should the Judge Care?

Tex. Est. Code § 1201.003 provides that “A judge is liable on the judge’s bond to those damaged if damage or loss results to a guardianship or ward because of the gross neglect of the judge to use reasonable diligence in the performance of the judge’s duty under this subchapter.”

While this is not the same as personal liability (See *Twilligear v. Carrell*, 148 S.W.3d 502 (2004 Tex. App. Houston 14th District 2004) (pet. denied)), judges with probate jurisdiction, especially statutory probate judges, do not relish having a target on the back of their robes.

Active judicial oversight, requiring guardians to timely account, and employing ad litem to assist the court in enforcing the probate code, are the best

defenses the courts have in minimizing loss to the wards and eventual distributees in probate.

Judicial Bonds – as of November 1, 2017, any county-level judge (Constitutional County Court or County Court at Law) who handles probate or guardianship matters must furnish a surety bond - In counties with a population of 125,000 or less, this bond must be \$100,000.00.

- In counties with a population of more than 125,000, this bond must be \$250,000.00.

- Judges of Statutory Probate Courts must furnish a bond of \$500,000.00, mandated by Tex. Govt Code § 25.00231 .

- The bond is to be conditioned that the judge will perform the duties required by the Texas Estates Code (i.e. follow-up on Inventories and Accountings, monitor guardianships)

- The bond is to provide coverage for losses caused by the gross negligence of county-level judge.

- In lieu of a bond, the county may elect to obtain insurance instead.

B. Certification Requirements:

An Attorney Ad Litem must be certified to obtain appointments in guardianship proceedings. A Guardian Ad Litem need not be so certified. Additionally, the attorney for the Applicant must be so certified. Tex. Est. Code §1054.201.

Certification requires completion of a State Bar of Texas-sponsored four hour CLE course on guardianship law and procedure, including one hour on alternatives to guardianship and supports and services available to proposed wards. Tex. Est. Code § 1054.201(b). These courses are available on videotape, in live presentations and via internet.

Once certification is obtained, a copy of the certificate should be forwarded to the appropriate courts. Re-certification is required every two (2) years until the attorney has been certified for four years, and then the certification is effective for a four (4) year period. Tex. Est. Code § 1054.202.

When a certificate has expired, a new certificate must be obtained for the attorney to be eligible for appointment as an Attorney Ad Litem. Tex. Est. Code § 1054.203.

The certification requirement applies during administration of the guardianship as well. In *Guardianship of Marburger*, 2010 Tex. App. LEXIS

10255 (Tex. App. Corpus Christi, December 30, 2010, no pet.).

An uncertified attorney has no authority to represent the Ward and lacks standing to bring an appeal. *Guardianship of Wehe*, 2012 Tex. App. LEXIS 8931 (Tex. App. Corpus Christi, October 25, 2012, no pet.)

A complaint about an attorney ad litem who is not properly certified is not a basis for a writ of mandamus, but could be raised by direct appeal or a statutory bill of review. *In Re: Cunningham*, 2014 Tex. App. LEXIS 13682 (Tex. App. Texarkana December 19, 2014)

No certification is required for Attorneys Ad Litem in other proceedings, such as heirship or trust matters.

C. Liability and Immunity:

1. Attorney Ad Litem - Like any other attorney, an Attorney ad Litem must exercise the same due diligence and vigor and astuteness required of an attorney as in any other representation. *Estate of Tartt*, 531 S.W.2d at 698. Otherwise, there is the potential for a claim for legal malpractice.

In *Ex Parte Parker*, 2014 Tex. App. LEXIS 36 (Tex. App. Amarillo, January 3, 2014, no pet.), the appeals court noted that allegations of ineffective assistance of an appointed Attorney ad Litem would be reviewed under the same standard as in cases regarding termination of parental rights.

The standard (applied by both the Texas Supreme Court and the U. S. Supreme Court) requires a complainant to demonstrate 1) the counsel's assistance fell below an objective standard of reasonableness and 2) that the ad litem's deficient assistance prejudiced the Ward's case. Such allegations must be firmly founded in, and affirmatively demonstrated by, the court's record.

In *Guardianship of Humphrey*, 2009 Tex. App. LEXIS 1100 (Tex. App. Tyler, Feb. 18, 2009, pet. denied), the appellants were required to raise the issue of the Attorney ad Litem's ineffective assistance to the trial court.

2. Guardian Ad Litem - Tex. Est. Code § 1054.056 provides for immunity from civil damages for a Guardian Ad Litem (appointed under §§ 1054.051, 1102.001, or 1202.054) from recommendations made or opinions given as a Guardian Ad Litem. (Except for willfully wrongful, reckless, bad faith, malicious and grossly negligent statements.) Cf: *Kabbani v. Papadopolous* 2009 Tex. App. LEXIS 1320 (Tex. App. Houston 1st Dist, February 26, 2009, pet. denied) (court upheld similar statutory immunity for a Guardian Ad Litem under the Texas Family Code) and *Wilz v. Sanders*, 2005 Tex. App. LEXIS 1503, (Tex.

App. - Waco 2005, no pet.) February 23, 2005 (Memorandum) (Immunity of Guardian Ad Litem upheld where appointed under federal statute).

In addition, Tex. R. Civ. Proc. 173 governs ad litem appointments of Guardians Ad Litem other than pursuant to a specific statute, such as the Family Code and the Estates Code, or by other rules, such as the Parental Notification Rules.

The responsibility of the Guardian Ad Litem under these circumstances is very limited, and the Guardian Ad Litem is specifically not to participate in the underlying litigation (even reviewing the discovery or litigation files) except to the limited extent of the division of settlement proceeds. *Jocson v. Crabb*, 133 S. W. 3d 268 (Tex. 2004) (per curiam), *on remand*, 196 S.W.3d 302 (Tex. App. Houston 1st Dist. 2006, no pet.). A Guardian Ad Litem may, of course, choose to actively participate in the litigation and discovery, but compensation is not to be awarded for such activity.

Only in extraordinary circumstances does the rule contemplate that a Guardian Ad Litem will have a broader role. Even then, the role is limited to determining whether a party's next friend or guardian has an interest adverse to the party that should be considered by the court under Tex. R. Civ. Proc. 44.

Unlike the immunity conferred for a Guardian ad Litem in a guardianship proceeding, there is no statutory immunity for a Guardian ad Litem appointed under the non-guardianship provisions of the Texas Estates Code or for a Guardian ad Litem appointed under the Trust Code (Tex. Prop. Code § 115.014). In those cases, the issue of possible derived judicial immunity must be examined. Derived judicial immunity affords an officer of the court the same immunity as a judge acting in his or her official capacity being absolute immunity for judicial acts performed in the scope of jurisdiction. *Dallas County v. Halsey*, 87 S.W.3d 552, 554 (Tex. 2002). For an extended analysis of the issue of derived judicial immunity for ad litem, see Smith, *op. cit.* at 10.

II. AREAS IN WHICH AD LITEMS ARE APPOINTED BY SPECIFIC STATUTE

A. Appointment of a Guardian

1. ATTORNEY AD LITEM

A. Defined § 1002.002 - "an attorney appointed by a court to represent and advocate on behalf of a proposed ward, an incapacitated person or an unborn person in a guardianship proceeding."

B. Mandatory - The appointment of an Attorney

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Title search: The Ad Litem Manual 2020: For Guardianship & Heirship Proceedings in Texas Probate Courts

Also available as part of the eCourse

[2020 Estate Planning, Guardianship, and Elder Law eConference](#)

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