

**TESTIMONY OF
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REGARDING ELDER ABUSE IN PENNSYLVANIA
BEFORE THE
HOUSE AGING AND OLDER ADULT SERVICES
COMMITTEE
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
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Good morning Chairman Hennessey, Chairman Samuelson, and members of the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee. My name is Ray Landis, and I am the Advocacy Manager for AARP Pennsylvania. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee today to discuss the growing problem of elder abuse and how providers and advocates can work to combat this situation.

As I begin, I would like to note that in early 2012, two of my colleagues from the AARP National office, Diana Noel and Julie Nepvue, testified before this Committee focusing on the financial exploitation of older Pennsylvanians. Part of that testimony concerned the Uniform Adult Guardianship and Protective Proceedings Jurisdiction Act introduced by Chairman Hennessey. Since then, this legislation was approved by the General Assembly and signed into law as Act 108 of 2012 by the Governor. AARP would like to publicly thank this Committee for initiating and pushing this new law, as it is a step toward combating elder abuse by ensuring that Pennsylvania joins other states in setting common rules for establishing the jurisdiction in which guardianship cases will be heard.

Unfortunately, this new law only touches on a part of the continuing battle against elder abuse in our society. The AARP Public Policy Institute reports that caseloads for adult protective services have increased each year in the period from 2010-12 in more than 75% of the states. A great deal of this increase has resulted from investigations of financial exploitation, which can take many forms – from the fraudulent contractor who takes advantage of a vulnerable senior who answers the front door to the younger relative who “borrows” money with no intention of ever returning it. As Julie & Diana pointed out last year, financial exploitation of the elderly is the fastest growing form of elder abuse, and it is by far the most prevalent crime committed against the elderly.

Of course we must not overlook actual physical abuse. We are all horrified this takes place in any circumstance, but it is particularly galling when the victim is elderly. But the threat of physical abuse through intimidation is also a frightening aspect of elder abuse. Many older Pennsylvanians, particularly those who live independently or alone, experience a sense of vulnerability. Unfortunately, we have far too many instances of those who choose to exploit this vulnerability. The implication of possible physical harm is also a form of elder abuse that we must recognize and work to prevent.

As an advocacy organization with 1.8 million members across Pennsylvania, AARP strives to be a part of the solution in preventing elder abuse. Part of this is to advocate before the General Assembly for strong laws that protect our older citizens, but another aspect of our role is to educate our members and all citizens about the

many forms of elder abuse. In Pennsylvania, AARP's Consumer Issues Task Force has conducted hundreds of presentations on ways to combat the financial exploitation of older Pennsylvanians, focusing on scams and frauds. The Task Force has partnered with the Pennsylvania Security Exchange Commission on numerous events, and has played investment fraud bingo with older Pennsylvanians at Senior Centers all across the Commonwealth.

On a national level, the AARP Bulletin, the newspaper which our members receive each month has published a series of articles over the past few years detailing the prevalence of elder abuse and encouraging readers to recognize and report situations they encounter. The annual observance of Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which took place this year in June, has been an opportunity for many advocacy organizations, including AARP, to raise awareness about this problem. AARP published the 7 ways any individual can help stop elder abuse in conjunction with Elder Abuse Awareness Day this year. They are:

1. Learn what elder abuse is, even if you think you already know—Find the warning signs of elder abuse at the HHS Administration on Aging
2. Help elders in your life be smart with their money—The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, have just launched a new curriculum called “Money Smart for Older Adults,” which includes instructor and participant guides
3. Offer respite for friends and family who are caring for elders—Set a schedule with friends, siblings, neighbors, and professional helpers to take the pressure off. If you're a primary caregiver
4. Think not only outside the box, but outside the country—HelpAge USA, a group that sometimes partners with AARP on international initiatives like helping the victims of Haiti's devastating earthquake in 2010, has launched a program to fight elder abuse in developing countries, where laws may not protect older people.
5. If you'd rather stick close to home, volunteer for a group that helps fight elder abuse in the US—AARP's Create the Good makes it easy to volunteer, giving you a chance to enter your location and interests and see opportunities in your community
6. Make some noise—Learn about the places in your community that care for elders and find out what standards they need to meet.

7. Pick up the phone, or a pen—If you've gotten out of the habit of calling and writing the older people in your life, recommit to staying in touch

Everyone in Pennsylvania should have an interest in preventing elder abuse. Whether it is physical abuse, financial exploitation, or intimidation, elder abuse hurts older Pennsylvanians and impacts all of our lives. I thank the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee for holding this hearing to shine a light on a dark corner that all of us sometimes prefer not to look into as closely as we should. Only by acknowledging and addressing this problem can we take the steps we need to end elder abuse and make growing older in Pennsylvania a safer and more secure process.