

Protecting Elders from Abuse Needs to be A National Priority: Support Funding the Elder Justice Initiative

Problem: It is estimated that 1 in 10 elders experience some form of abuse or neglect and for each case of elder abuse that is reported, 24 are not. Elder abuse occurs in the community and long-term care facilities. In fact, one study found that 44% of the 2,000 nursing home residents interviewed said they had been abused and 95% had been neglected or witnessed neglect of another resident. An astounding one in two individuals with dementia are victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation. Adult Protective Services (APS) is statutorily responsible for assisting elders and adults with disabilities and is often the first responder in cases involving abuse, neglect and exploitation. However, a national infrastructure for Adult Protective Services has never been established. Despite their responsibility to protect and assist elders and vulnerable adults, APS lacks reliable data and federal guidance regarding case investigation. Additionally, there is a lack of evidence-based research addressing reduction of these crimes.

The Elder Justice Initiative: The Elder Justice Initiative is an effort to improve our nation's response to elder abuse by appropriating \$25 million to fund key activities. The President has proposed this funding in his FY 2015 budget request. The Initiative includes \$13.8 million to develop an APS National Data System, provide technical assistance, establish national demonstration grants to enhance data systems and create program standards and an evaluation process. The remaining funding of \$11.2 million will support evidence-based research to improve elder abuse screening and reduce victimization.

The Elder Justice Initiative stems from the Elder Justice Act, which was enacted and signed into law in 2010. However, funding for the Elder Justice Act provisions has never been appropriated. These provisions promote elder justice by improving the detection and investigation of elder abuse, both in the community and in long-term care facilities and by strengthening the federal and state programs responsible for preventing, investigating and reporting elder abuse. The EJA provisions include: providing training and increasing capacity of vital programs like Adult Protective Services and the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, supporting evidence-based research to reduce elder abuse, enhancing the effectiveness of APS by establishing national APS standards, establishing a national data collection system and creating a national training institute for federal and state surveyors for detecting and investigating abuse, neglect and exploitation in long-term care facilities.

Importance of Funding the Elder Justice Initiative: Elder abuse is widespread and has dire consequences for millions of older adults and families in our country. It is estimated that victims of financial exploitation lose \$2.9 billion a year and direct medical costs due to elder abuse are estimated to exceed \$5 billion annually. The lack of funding to develop national standards and a national database directly impacts how effective APS workers can be in identifying and investigating cases and limits their ability to protect vulnerable adults from abuse.

Recommendation: Congress should support the President's FY 2015 budget request of \$25 million for the Elder Justice Initiative. This is an important first step to building a national infrastructure for APS and implementing some of the EJA provisions. Such a federal investment will better protect elders and adults with disabilities from abuse, both in the community and in long-term care facilities, and benefit our country's overall health and economic future.

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (formerly NCCNHR) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization founded in 1975 by Elma L. Holder that advocates for quality care and quality of life for consumers in all long-term-care settings.