

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care submits the following comments on the WHCOA Elder Justice Brief and its discussion questions:

• Increasing the Public's Awareness of Elder Abuse, Neglect, and/or Financial Exploitation

The recommendations put forward by the Elder Justice Coordinating Council in 2014, which are listed above, include the development of a broad-based public awareness campaign with consistent messaging to raise national awareness of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. A national campaign of this type is critical to increasing public awareness of this issue, and in order to execute a successful public awareness campaign, there must be sufficient funding at the national level to support elder justice activities. We believe that Congress must fully fund the provisions of the Elder Justice Act, as well as provide stronger funding for the Older American Act's Title VII Elder Abuse Prevention Program, to support increasing public awareness of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. The Elder Justice Act, if fully implemented and funded, would make grants available to states and communities to support raising awareness of these issues. Funding is needed to implement this critical provision, which would greatly assist in public awareness efforts. In addition, stronger funding for elder justice activities through Title VII of the Older Americans Act could help to support an influential national public awareness campaign on elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. Such a campaign should include strong public service advertising across traditional and new media and would include participation and support from a number of stakeholders, including but not limited to law enforcement, state and local governments, public schools, long-term care providers, Adult Protective Services (APS) agencies, long-term care ombudsmen and community organizations. An intergenerational approach is key to combating elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. Public awareness campaigns focused on these issues should seek to engage individuals of all ages and backgrounds.

• Innovative Practices Designed to Prevent Elder Abuse, Neglect, and/or Financial Exploitation

Because of funding through programs such as Title VII of the Older Americans Act (OAA), some state and local communities have been able to implement innovative practices to prevent elder abuse, neglect and/or financial exploitation. Innovative practices in states that have come to our attention include the development of elder abuse informational cards for law enforcement officers and programs designed to educate and increase awareness of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation among faith based leaders in communities. Ultimately, however, the issue of having more innovative practices like these in states and communities requires sufficient appropriations to support these activities, both for Title VII of the OAA and for provisions of the Elder Justice Act, such



as one that would provide competitive grants to states to test and evaluate innovative approaches to elder abuse. We also recommend establishment of a clearinghouse of elder justice innovations.

• **Improving the Effectiveness of Elder Justice Programs**

Adult Protective Services is responsible by law for assisting elders and adults with disabilities and is often the first responder in cases involving abuse, neglect and exploitation. However, despite their responsibility to protect and help elders and other vulnerable adults, APS lacks reliable data and federal guidance regarding case investigation. This impacts how effective APS can be in identifying and investigating abuse. We can improve the effectiveness of APS through federal funding to establish a national infrastructure for Adult Protective Services, which would include a national APS database and national APS standards. We can also improve the effectiveness of long-term care ombudsmen in assisting consumers that may be experiencing elder abuse by funding the elder abuse training and support for ombudsmen that is stipulated in the Elder Justice Act. Lastly, federal and state surveyors that are tasked with investigating Medicare- and Medicaid-certified nursing facilities' compliance with federal and state regulations as well as complaints regarding quality of life and quality of care in these settings need additional assistance to more effectively recognize and cite cases of elder abuse. Funding the National Training Institute for Surveyors, which is called for under the Elder Justice Act, would help to assist federal and state surveyors in investigations of allegations of abuse, neglect and exploitation and improve the effectiveness of these individuals in recognizing and responding to elder abuse cases.

• **Opportunities to Use Information Technology and Other Tools to Help Elders Stay Connected with Families and Caregivers / Technological Tools to Help Prevent Financial Exploitation of Older Americans**

There are opportunities to use technology to educate and inform the general public as well as professionals about financial exploitation of older Americans. For example, e-learning curricula could be used to train individuals in recognizing and responding to instances of financial exploitation. Technological tools such as mobile "apps" could help to better inform consumers themselves and the general public about financial exploitation. As more than half of older adults now use the internet to stay connected (and, for many, internet use is a daily fixture of their lives), we must find ways to use this medium to better educate individuals about elder financial exploitation and to protect older adults from online financial scams and frauds to which they may be vulnerable. In addition, as more older adults are online, tools such as video calling through applications such as Skype and Google+ as well as social media and e-mail, could help elders stay better connected with families and caregivers. Ensuring that older adults, particularly those residing in long-term care facilities, have adequate access to computers and the



Internet is vital for them to maintain contact with family and friends.

• Potential Partnerships to Support Efforts to Prevent and Address Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Financial Exploitation

Collaborative approaches to combat elder abuse, neglect and financial exploitation are critical, and better partnerships among various entities such as law enforcement, long-term care ombudsmen, APS, health care providers, legal services and others should be a key goal of our future efforts to prevent and address elder abuse. One way more partnerships could be supported is through the funding of elder abuse forensic centers that help to integrate services by bringing together a wide array of elder abuse experts and professionals to investigate and respond to allegations and cases of elder abuse. The Elder Justice Act authorizes grants to eligible entities to establish these centers and develop forensic expertise pertaining to elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation; funding this provision of the Act would result in stronger partnerships at the local level that would assist in better combating elder abuse. In addition, federal agencies must continue to work together on elder abuse issues, including efforts to raise national public awareness around elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.