

# THE ELDER JUSTICE COALITION

A NATIONAL ADVOCACY VOICE FOR ELDER JUSTICE IN AMERICA  
JOHN B. BREAU, HONORARY CHAIR ♦ ROBERT B. BLANCATO, NATIONAL COORDINATOR

## **Hearing-Senate Special Committee on Aging-“Justice for All: Ending Abuse, Neglect and Financial Exploitation”**

### **Elder Justice Coalition Testimony**

**Submitted by Bob Blancato, National Coordinator**

**March 2, 2011**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

The non-partisan 704 member Elder Justice Coalition is pleased to present this testimony in conjunction with the hearing entitled “Justice for All: Ending Elder Abuse, Neglect and Financial Exploitation.” We begin by commending Chairman Kohl for his consistent leadership on behalf of elder justice issues and most especially adult protective services. As America’s population ages, each day, elder abuse, neglect and exploitation becomes a more serious issue in this country.

We are pleased that the Committee chose to convene this hearing to coincide with the release of the GAO report on the state of adult protective services in our nation. Our Coalition was involved with your staff and the GAO from the very outset of this report and were pleased to have a number of our member organizations as well as our National Coordinator be interviewed on several occasions by the GAO for this study.

This report confirms if not reinforces our contention that at a time when the need for their services is increasing, adult protective services find themselves in a most perilous condition due to cutbacks in federal and especially state funding. They are the frayed front line in our nation’s long overdue commitment to combating the evils of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.

We see this GAO report as an important advocacy tool in our continued work to secure funding for the Elder Justice Act which became law last year. More than 70 percent of the funds authorized in this Act will go to adult protective services. We were heartened to see President Obama’s request for initial funding for the Elder Justice Act in his FY 2012 budget with the bulk of the funds directed to demonstration grants to enhance the quality of APS services. We are hopeful that the GAO report will make true the statement that data drives dollars. This report provides the data on the need for this support. Let us hope that Congress in a bi-partisan way can respond. Another report, recently released by AARP and NASUAD, the National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities, and Health Management Associates [Weathering the Storm: The Impact of the Great Recession on Long-Term Services and Supports](#) found that there was a significant and disturbing trend in the increase in calls requesting adult protective services. The report states that, “Twenty-five states reported that financial exploitation was the number one cause of such calls. An additional 20 states reported that neglect was a factor in the calls.” Many of the calls indicated that self neglect was a major issue among the elderly living in the home and these types of cases are best addressed first by APS.

We are pleased to also use this testimony as an opportunity to formally endorse your bill the Elder Abuse Victims Act of 2011. We appreciate your renewed commitment to getting this critically important piece of elder justice legislation passed. As you know, language closely resembling your EAVA was in the original Elder Justice Act and a similar bill to yours has passed the House on two previous occasions. We believe the improvements you have made to this bill make it a better piece of legislation. Your linkage of elder justice and job creation makes the legislation especially relevant in these difficult economic times. Furthermore the fact that these jobs would be created with the

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intention of improving capacity to prosecute elder abuse cases is especially laudable and urgently needed. We also see the value of creating a new Office of Elder Justice within the Department of Justice. There is a critical need to coordinate the entire existing federal infrastructure that currently deals with elder justice but perhaps nowhere as critical as DOJ with its responsibility over both VAWA and the Victims of Crime Act.

We also commend the hearing's focus on the new study done in New York State on the prevalence of elder abuse. This is an important new study because it sheds new light and provides updated data on an area that this Committee in the past has focused on; the high percentage of elder abuse cases that go unreported. This study indicates the problem could be far worse than we know if only 1 out of 23.5 cases of elder abuse are reported.

The Elder Justice Coalition has long contended that you cannot stop what you don't report. However, unless adult protective services are adequately funded there is no one central place in each state where cases can be reported. As of today, elder abuse continues to be the only form of family violence for which the federal government has provided extremely limited resources.

We also support the Committee's focus on the important issue of the impact of domestic violence in later life. It is especially relevant to look at this issue in anticipation of the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act later this year.

This hearing will serve to heighten the national call to action to end elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. It will help raise awareness about the issue, and will direct advocates to work on important solutions such as the EAVA, a reauthorized VAWA and the Senior Financial Empowerment Act.

The Elder Justice Coalition was established as an outgrowth of the pioneering work done by this Committee close to 10 years ago on the then new topic of elder justice. In that ten year period, we have seen a dramatic growth in the number of older Americans. The population is aging right before our eyes. We know the numbers today, 34 million persons over 65 and this year the first wave of boomers will turn 65 and by the time they all do we will have a doubling of our elderly population. We have also seen a sustained economic downturn which has led to an increase in the number of cases of elder financial abuse. Financial abuse for the past several years has been one of the fastest rising forms of elder abuse and the MetLife Mature Market Institute, the Center for Gerontology at Virginia Tech and the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse 2009 report was a real eye opener for all of us involved in the elder abuse field. Its main finding is that the annual financial loss by victims of senior financial abuse is a very conservative estimate of \$2.6 billion lost per year.

In this the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Special Committee on Aging, we are grateful that you chose elder justice as your first hearing topic. We pledge our continued willingness to work with you throughout this Congress to advance elder justice.

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to present this testimony. *Please direct any questions to Robert Blancato or Shannon Donahue at [elderjustice@verizon.net](mailto:elderjustice@verizon.net).*

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