

Robert Blancato
National Coordinator
Elder Justice Coalition

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro;

On behalf of the bipartisan Elder Justice Coalition and its 3,000 members, we thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of \$25 million in funding for the Elder Justice Act within the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living, as well as for maintaining funding for the Social Services Block Grant.

Our topic must always be a bipartisan issue: preventing elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. We ask this Subcommittee to provide this funding in a bipartisan fashion as part of the solution to the national disgrace of elder abuse.

According to the Department of Justice, there are more than six million victims of elder abuse per year; roughly one of every ten persons over 60 will end up a victim of elder abuse. However, a New York State study found for every elder abuse case known to agencies, twenty-four were unreported. Victims of elder financial abuse lose at least \$2.9 billion per year, which can include entire life savings. A 2015 study published by True Link Financial found that the problem of financial exploitation may be as great as \$36 billion per year. One-half of those with dementia will fall victim to elder abuse, neglect and/or exploitation. In short, the situation is dire.

The Elder Justice Act, passed in 2010, would address these problems. The Act, if funded, would strengthen the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. It would provide for the development of forensic centers to study the problem of abuse and how we can better detect abuse and potential abusers. It would also enhance and train long-term care staffing in facilities.

Funding for the Elder Justice Act has not been provided to fulfill the provisions of the Act. We are very grateful for the funding from the Appropriations Committee last year for the Act in the amount of \$8 million, but the Act needs more of an investment in order to fulfill its potential. This is why we support funding for the Act at last year's proposed \$25 million level.

Data collection is essential to understanding and preventing elder abuse. Other forms of crime, such as child abuse, have standardized national databases—the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) database has been in existence since 1998. This allows states to more easily discover trends and researchers to learn about perpetrators and victims. A lack of data has also hurt the elder justice community's efforts to call awareness to the problem of elder abuse and to compete effectively for resources in an era where data often drives dollars. Continuing the work started in FY 2013 with the continued funding of a National Adult Maltreatment Reporting System (NAMRS), a national Adult Protective Services (APS) data collection system, is vital for consistency in the field.

The Coalition also supports the evaluation and analysis of APS programs using an

evidence-based approach and best practices. To be effective, APS programs must have consistency and high quality nationally. Elder abuse happens in all states and congressional districts, and in some cases, elder abuse happens across county and state lines. Thus, having uniform best practices is key to ensuring that victims receive uniform services.

Research in the elder abuse field, like data collection, is desperately needed. Money has never been specifically appropriated for research; the limited resources that the field has go straight into assisting victims. However, victims can be more appropriately—and cost-effectively—assisted if they are identified early via effective screening. A great deal of trauma can be prevented with effective screening. Thus, research into how to screen accurately is exceedingly important.

This increased investment of \$25 million would mean that current federal and state resources could be used more effectively while also responding to elder abuse systematically. For these reasons, as well as the potential of lowering rates of future victimization, the investment would provide a solid return on investment.

This is an investment because, according to the National Center on Elder Abuse, the direct medical costs associated with elder abuse now exceed \$5 billion annually. Since these victims are older adults, Medicare and Medicaid bear the bulk of these costs. Other federal programs may end up paying for elder abuse victims, including income support programs, because financial abuse victims who were once self-supporting may lose everything in one scam. We can save money for the federal government if we make this relatively small investment today.

We also support maintaining, if not increasing, the amount of money available for Social Services Block Grant programs, which in addition to providing APS funding, also provides important funding for supportive services available to elder abuse victims. APS is primarily funded through optional state distributions from their Social Services Block Grant allotment; only 37 states provide any additional federal funding for their federal APS programs.

Since the Elder Justice Act has many more important provisions that are not funded in this proposal, please view this \$25 million as a floor to build on, and not a ceiling. We look forward to working with you to ensure that this elder justice appropriation provides our nation with the best possible return on investment and outcomes.

Thank you for your past and future support.