

Letter: Taking stock of elder abuse

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To the editor:

As the June 15 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day approaches, slow progress is being made to protect elders from financial exploitation.

A 2009 study by the MetLife Mature Market Institute estimates at least \$2.6 billion a year is lost through elder financial exploitation. Financial abuse involves more than credit card theft and missing jewelry. In particular, women 80 years of age and older are targeted by scammers who may be friends or strangers, financial, legal or medical professionals, realtors, clergy, other elderly and family members. These parties may work together to exploit the elder, leaving the elder penniless and, in their twilight years, the responsibility of the taxpayer.

Below is how some states are addressing the issue:

In Massachusetts: On Oct. 23, 2014, the Special Commission on Elder Protective Services co-chaired by state Sen. Pat Jehlen and state Rep. James O'Day, finally released its report. Issues include the lack of training of Massachusetts investigators in financial exploitation, the screening out of abuse complaints without investigation, a need for protocols among law enforcement, district attorneys and protective services workers, and the implementation of financial abuse specialist teams. Though Arlington formed an Elder Abuse Task Force and state Rep. Paul Brodeur filed legislation to fund protective services worker training in dementia, little else has resulted from the report.

In Maine: On March 11, 2015, the Maine Attorney General Task Force released its report on financial exploitation of the elderly. While similar to the Massachusetts report (ie. lack of training and staffing), the Maine report goes further, noting that cases of financial crimes against elders are not being investigated and prosecuted as they should be, too often viewed as "private family matters or civil issues rather than crimes."

The report suggests the judiciary needs training in elder exploitation and recommends expediting elder cases, noting elders often die before abuse cases are prosecuted. The report concludes, "There is a pervasive lack of training for all professionals in the system, including law enforcement, prosecutors, judges and court personnel."

In Georgia: Proposed legislation contains a racketeering provision that enables prosecutors to pursue organizations or individuals who work together to target seniors' assets. Massachusetts should file similar racketeering legislation and vigorously prosecute those parties who work together to deplete elder assets.

However, financial exploitation crosses state lines and cries for national solutions. If you or your family

has experienced financial exploitation of elders, please contact your state and federal legislators.

Legislators need to hear from you.

Kendra Cooper

Elder advocate

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