

AG Schimel: Takes action with Task Force on Elder Abuse

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. – Attorney General Brad Schimel today held the fourth meeting of the Attorney General’s Task Force on Elder Abuse, and is continuing to take action on elder abuse as elder abuse in Wisconsin grows. According to data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), from 2001 to 2017, reported allegations of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation and requests for information about elder abuse increased 160% in Wisconsin.

“The latest data on elder abuse is sobering, and it could only get worse if we don’t act now,” said Attorney General Schimel. “Wisconsin’s elderly population will increase 72% in the next two decades; we cannot wait to do better for our elderly loved ones. We have to raise awareness, increase access to support for victims, and strengthen our response to this abuse. When this task force’s work is complete, we will have a more coordinated response to elder abuse – statewide and across disciplines. More families in Wisconsin will have the peace of mind that their loved ones are being cared for with the utmost respect and dignity that they deserve.”

At the task force meeting on Thursday, August 2, Attorney General Schimel and task force members discussed financial exploitation, reforms to address elder abuse in other states, and needed criminal law changes, and the latest data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services on elder abuse in Wisconsin.

In June 2018, DHS released the 2017 elder abuse and neglect report. From 2016 to 2017, total reported allegations of abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation in Wisconsin increased by 4.8%. In the same time period, alleged financial exploitation alone increased 17.5%. And from 2001 to 2017, reported allegations of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation and requests for information about elder abuse increased 160% in Wisconsin.

“Caring for the state’s older residents has always been a priority at the Department of Health Services,” said DHS Secretary Linda Seemeyer. “We look forward to working with the task force to ensure Wisconsin is a place where everyone is safe and can live their best life.”

Attorney General Schimel has prioritized elder abuse, and in August 2017, launched the Attorney General’s Task Force on Elder Abuse. The task force is made up of representatives from Wisconsin Department of Justice, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions, the Wisconsin State Legislature, law enforcement, Wisconsin Court System, Board on Aging and Long Term Care, Wisconsin Bankers Association, crime victim services, adult protective services, senior living facilities, and senior citizen advocacy organizations.

The task force is charged with compiling the resources and knowledge of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals to study the impact of elder abuse in Wisconsin and assess ways to improve outcomes for this growing population of citizens. In addition to developing strategies to address barriers in investigations and prosecutions of elder abuse, the task force will strengthen consumer protection for seniors and create recommendations for improved cross-system communications.

In addition to the task force’s work, Attorney General Schimel has moved quickly to provide public safety tools to seniors and their loved ones. DOJ worked with law enforcement and aging and senior care experts and advocates to raise awareness about elder abuse and encourage citizens to report abuse against seniors. The public awareness campaign, first launched in January 2018 with radio ads, encourages citizens to report suspected elder abuse of any kind, teaches how to recognize elder abuse, and connects victims with resources. In May 2018, Attorney General Schimel launched a new website, www.ReportElderAbuseWI.org, and paid online outreach aimed at elder abuse victims.

In October 2017, Attorney General Schimel expanded Dose of Reality, a statewide prevention campaign designed to raise awareness about prescription drug abuse and its effect on the opioid epidemic, to include resources and information unique to seniors and caregivers.

The attorney general also started “Safe Seniors Camera Program,” a new pilot project in Brown, Outagamie, and Winnebago counties that allows Wisconsin residents, who suspect a caregiver is abusing their loved one, to use a covert

camera to provide surveillance over someone who may have been harmed by a caregiver in their residence.

To report suspected financial, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, please contact your county elder adult-at-risk agency or call 1-800-488-3780. If you witness an act of abuse, neglect, or exploitation that requires immediate attention, please call 911.