

Dept. of Financial Institutions: Recognizes World Elder Abuse Awareness Day by sharing tips to reduce the risk of financial exploitation

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MADISON, Wis. – The [Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions \(DFI\)](#) recognizes [World Elder Abuse Awareness Day](#) today by sharing tips to reduce the potential for financial exploitation in financial accounts and increase the likelihood of prosecution should such exploitation occur.

“I’ve been proud of our efforts to protect aging and older adults, including signing several bills to help prevent elder neglect, abuse, and financial exploitation, as we continue our work to support Wisconsinites of every age,” said Gov. Tony Evers. “This World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, we join Wisconsinites across our state in pledging to continue this critical work helping to prevent abuse against aging and older adults across our state.”

Since World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2021, Gov. Evers signed bipartisan legislation to establish response and investigation requirements for abuse, neglect, financial exploitation of aging and older adults who are at risk, creating penalties for physical abuse of older adults, and increasing penalties for crimes against older adults. On World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2022, the DFI is working to raise awareness about financial crimes and exploitation and ensuring aging and older adults are protected from predatory practices.

“Many older adults add a friend or relative to their bank accounts as a joint account owner in order to avoid probate or for the convenience of having someone else make sure the bills are paid,” said DFI Secretary-designee Cheryll Olson-Collins. “However, once someone is made a joint owner of the account, they have a right to use the money in the account in any way they choose. Despite the fact that the original owner was the person who contributed to all of the funds to the account, growing it over years of hard work and saving, the new joint owner will be able to spend all of the money without consequence.”

The DFI cautions account owners to carefully consider their options before adding anyone to their financial accounts as a joint owner. If the primary concern is probate, this can be easily avoided by using a Transfer on Death (TOD) or Payable on Death (POD) account, which does not transfer ownership of the account until the death of the account owner. If the primary concern is to allow someone else to handle the payment of bills, there are other options, such as designating a trusted individual as an authorized agent on an account. This can often be achieved by simply filling out a form supplied by the account owner’s financial institution.

“The benefit of designating someone as an authorized agent is that it gives the individual the access they need to account funds, but also places on them a fiduciary duty to act in the account owner’s best interest,” said DFI Secretary-designee Olson-Collins. “Misuse of funds would be actionable as financial exploitation or theft, and it is much simpler to prosecute an exploitation case where the wrongdoer does not have the defense that they had an ownership interest in the account.”

If account owners have questions about designating a trusted individual as an authorized agent or how TOD and POD accounts work, they are encouraged to contact their financial institution.

Additional resources can be found at local [Aging and Disability Resource Centers](#) and the [Elder Rights Project of Legal Action of Wisconsin](#). The DFI also partners with these agencies, as well as the [Dane County Adult Protective Services](#), the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#), the [Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc.](#), and the [Wisconsin Department of Justice](#) in the fight to end



elder abuse in Wisconsin.

To learn more, contact the DFI's Division of Securities by emailing DFISecurities@dfi.wisconsin.gov or calling (608) 266-2139.