

# Dept. of Financial Institutions: Recognizes World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Posted on Thursday, Jun 15, 2023

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MADISON, Wis. – Today, in recognition of [World Elder Abuse Awareness Day](#), the [Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions \(DFI\)](#) reminds financial professionals and the people of Wisconsin to be on the lookout for signs of elder financial abuse and financial exploitation.

“While we are concerned with all forms of elder abuse, we are particularly focused on preventing financial exploitation of older adults in Wisconsin,” said DFI Secretary-designee Cheryll Olson-Collins. “Senior financial exploitation is a growing problem. Many in our elderly population are vulnerable due to social isolation and distance from family, caregivers, and other support networks. Taking time to understand the warning signs and the steps that can be taken to report financial abuse are key to helping those who cannot help themselves.”

In 2022, [Dane County Adult Protective Services](#) staff investigated at least 470 cases of substantiated elder abuse in Dane County alone. Of those cases, 29% involved financial exploitation with Dane County residents losing an estimated \$1,352,794 to financial exploitation. In over 50% of all cases of financial exploitation of older adults, the perpetrator is a close friend or family member. A common thread among those cases is the use of a joint account as a convenience for managing the older adult’s money without understanding that under Wisconsin law, both parties own a joint account and can control its use without regard to who put the money in the account and how the other owner expected it to be used. To help prevent financial exploitation, talk with a financial institution to ensure the older adult’s account is set up in a way that meets their goals while still providing protection. For more information and suggested questions to ask a financial institution about protecting

an account, read this [article](#) written by the [Elder Rights Project at Legal Action of Wisconsin](#).

The DFI's Division of Securities investigates several cases of investment fraud every year – from outright scams and Ponzi schemes to rogue financial professionals who groom older adults to win their trust before taking advantage. In most cases, the money cannot be recovered because it has already been spent by the perpetrator. One of the most important things an individual can do to protect their hard-earned money is to make sure their financial professional is registered to offer securities with the DFI by visiting the [BrokerCheck® by FINRA](#) website, the [U.S. Investment Adviser Public Disclosure](#) website, or calling the DFI's Division of Securities' examiner of the day at (608) 266-2139.

In addition, the DFI's Division of Securities' Enforcement Bureau has seen a sharp increase in complaints of “pig-butchering” scams. These scams start when a scammer builds a trusted relationship with the victim by using fake social media accounts and profiles with lavish lifestyles. In the process, they learn financial information about the victim, eventually persuading the victim to open digital asset accounts where money can be moved internationally in seconds. Then, the scammer creates fake websites and accounts to deceive the victim into believing they are making a profit, so they will invest more. Often, the scammer tries to convince the victim to bring in friends and family to the investment. When the victim wants to withdraw from the account, the scammer demands more funds. Once there is no more money, the scammer disappears, leaving the victim with huge losses.

Be alert for red flags of investment fraud, such as high-pressure sales tactics (asking the investor to commit before reading required disclosures), promises of high returns with little to no risk, a lack of disclosure materials or materials containing errors, a request to keep the investment secret, the investment involves wiring money overseas, or the use of gift cards or cryptocurrency. If it seems too good to be true, it likely is too good to be true. Trust your gut.

If you or a loved one believe you have been a victim of investment fraud, please report it to the DFI's Division of Securities right away by emailing [DFISecurities@dfi.wisconsin.gov](mailto:DFISecurities@dfi.wisconsin.gov) or calling (608) 266-2139. Do not be ashamed – scam artists are very persuasive and prey on emotions, so everyone is vulnerable.

Find additional resources at your local [Aging and Disability Resource Center](#) and the [Elder Rights Project at 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.

For more information, visit the DFI's [investor resources webpage](#), call (608) 266-2139, or email [DFISecurities@dfi.wisconsin.gov](mailto:DFISecurities@dfi.wisconsin.gov).