



*Advocacy • Action • Answers on Aging*

**Support for SB 49 and SB 50**  
**Increase Penalties/Stricter Sentencing Guidelines for Elder Abuse**  
Senate Judiciary Committee: February 10, 2015

Chairman Jones and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony in support of SB 49 and SB 50. My name is Ryan Cowmeadow and I am the Advocacy Manager for the Area Agency on Aging 1-B (AAA 1-B). Our service region includes Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair and Washtenaw Counties. Over 650,000<sup>1</sup> older adults over age 60 call our service region home. The mission of the Area Agency on Aging 1-B is to enhance the lives of older adults and adults with disabilities in the communities we serve. Protecting older and vulnerable adults from instances of elder abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation is not only paramount to our mission, but is also a major priority of the work we do.

Recent research published in the American Journal of Public Health<sup>2</sup> randomly surveyed 5,777 adults age 60+ from across the nation on their experiences with elder mistreatment. Shockingly, 10% of those surveyed reported experiencing emotional, physical, or sexual mistreatment or potential neglect in the past year. Applying this methodology to number of individuals age 60+ in Michigan as of 2015, it stands to reason that more than 223,000 older adults fell victim to abuse in the past year.

Elder abuse is often referred to as an invisible problem. This is because it can be hard to identify and victims may be afraid to report abuse fearing retaliation by the perpetrator who may be their caregiver, or for fear of being stigmatized as incompetent or unable to care for themselves. Research indicates that only 1 out of every 14 instances of elder abuse ever come to the attention of authorities.<sup>3</sup>

In Michigan, efforts by elder abuse prevention advocates and elder justice coalitions spread across the state have made major headway in raising awareness of the problem of elder abuse. This is evidenced by a 62% increase of referrals made to Adult Protective Services between 2010 and 2013.<sup>4</sup> However more can, and must be done – This is why we are in support of SB 49 and 50.

Advancing legislation designed to increase penalties and offer stricter sentencing guidelines sends the message to potential perpetrators that in Michigan, there is “no excuse for elder abuse.”

In closing, I offer one suggestion for consideration, as the legislation stands restitution and penalties would benefit public libraries. Should you advance this legislation, please consider an amendment whereby newly generated financial resources could benefit both public libraries and aid in the prevention of future instances of elder abuse. One solution may be to direct funds to the Office of Services to the Aging earmarked for Elder Abuse Prevention.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

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<sup>1</sup> Estimate provided by State Demographer Eric Guthrie, Personal Communication (1/20/2015)

<sup>2</sup> Acierno R, Hernandez MA, Amstadter AB, Resnick HS, Steve K, Muzzy W, et al. (2010). Prevalence and correlates of emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse and potential neglect in the United States: The national elder mistreatment study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(2), 292-297.

<sup>3</sup> National Research Council. (2003) *Elder mistreatment: Abuse, neglect and exploitation in an aging America*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

<sup>4</sup> [audgen.michigan.gov/finalpdfs/13\\_14/r431260113.pdf](http://audgen.michigan.gov/finalpdfs/13_14/r431260113.pdf)