

Sample Newsletter Article

Elder abuse. It even sounds ugly.

“The very thought of abuse of our elders conflicts with our notion of who we are and what we stand for,” said Illinois Department on Aging Director Charles D. Johnson.

“All of us in our wonderfully diverse state have one vision in common,” he said.

“We want to believe that there is respect for our parents’ past and assurance of their care and protection. And when we hear that our vision is out of focus, we want to look away.”

But elder abuse cannot be ignored. According to the Illinois Department on Aging, it is all around us. In every town, in every state, in every neighborhood. Three-fourths of the victims of elder abuse in Illinois are women. Their average age is 79. And about 75 percent of them are functionally impaired – either physically or mentally.

Four in five abusers are family members. Most are substance abusers. Some snapped under the stress of caregiving, unaware that help is available.

“Their tragedy is a reflection upon all of us and the values that define us,” said Johnson.

Help is in place, Johnson said, through state and local service providers. And tough state laws protect elders.

Illinois law defines abuse to mean neglect, physical, mental or sexual injury or financial exploitation to an adult 60 or older. When an elder cannot report for himself or herself, it mandates reporting of suspected abuse by service providers in an extensive list of fields, including social service, law enforcement, public service and medicine, including paramedics and emergency medical technicians. If these professional reporters fail to act, the law gets tough, requiring action against mandated reporters of abuse.

The law goes on to mandate “an aggressive training program” about elder abuse to public and private agencies that may encounter abuse and exploitation of older people in the state, including the use of signs in banks and other financial institutions that notify older people about their rights in the face of fraud and financial exploitation.

State law also protects residents of long-term care facilities against abuse and criminal neglect by the owner or an employee of the facility.

One of the most important amendments to the elder abuse law prevents people who are convicted of elder abuse from receiving any property or benefit after the death of the victim. This provision applies to anyone, family member or con artist, and to financial institutions as well.

Gov. Pat Quinn said the public must admit that elder abuse exists.

“We cannot turn away from it,” he said.

“We must make our message clear: If a vulnerable person in Illinois is abused, we will report suspicions. We will act on reports. And we will prosecute criminal offenders.

“Because in Illinois, our elders are considered treasures,” Gov. Pat Quinn said. “And we shall protect them.”

- Illinois Elder Abuse Hotline (24-Hour): 1-866-800-1409, 1-888-206-1327 (TTY)
- In Illinois last year, more than 7,000 older adults experienced abuse, often at the hand of their loved ones, the people they trusted most in the world.
- It is estimated that there are at least 10 cases of elder abuse for every one that is reported.
- Abuse can come in the form of financial exploitation or physical and emotional abuse or neglect.
- State law defines criminal neglect as acts that cause injury or deterioration of health and may be treated as a Class 3 felony.
- State law defines exploitation as the illegal use of assets or resources of a person who is 60 or over or who has a disability.
- Financial exploitation is a Class 4 felony if the value of the property is \$300 or less; a Class 3 felony if the value of the property is between \$300 and \$5,000; a Class 2 felony if the property is worth \$5,000 to \$10,000 and a Class 1 felony if the property is \$100,000 or more, or if the person is over 70 and the value of the property is \$15,000 or more or if the person is 80 or older and the value of the property is \$5,000 or more.
- State law allows the alleged victim to give testimony in the form of a deposition thus freeing the vulnerable elderly person from a court appearance.
- Any physician, dentist or dental hygienist “who willfully fails to report” will be referred to the Illinois State Medical Disciplinary Board of the Department of Financial and Professional Regulation for action.
- Any other mandated reporter who willfully fails to report suspected abuse will be charged with a Class A misdemeanor.
- A person whose criminal neglect of a long-term care facility resident results in the resident’s death is guilty of a Class 3 felony.
- Thousands of older persons suffer from cruel abuse and neglect, as well as rampant financial exploitation, usually at the hands of their loved ones and hidden from the eyes of the community. They are very often literally helpless to protect themselves, and only a small percentage of cases are ever reported. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, *“we are losing our elders to an epidemic rarely talked about or even acknowledged. An epidemic that leaves some ashamed, some afraid and too many dead.”*
- Types of mistreatment include physical, sexual and emotional abuse; neglect of basic care needs, either by others or by the vulnerable adults themselves; and financial exploitation of every description. The abusers are usually their own family members or caregivers. Estimates are that only one in 10 cases of elder abuse is ever reported, meaning that the vast majority of victims are suffering, often for years, because no one knows or cares to report the problem.
- Many elder abuse cases involve complicated financial matters; life and death medical problems; legal issues including questions of capacity, undue influence, guardianship, powers of attorney, and the rights of the client to self determination vs. the duty of the state to protect its helpless citizens; mental health concerns including all forms of mental illness; problems of substance abuse, especially among abusers; and myriad complex family situations.