



# NEWS RELEASE

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June 3, 2016

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## **ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN URGES SENIORS TO “TRUST BUT VERIFY” WHERE MONEY IS CONCERNED**

### **Campaign Designed to Empower Seniors to Ask the Difficult Questions**

Oakland, CA – A woman receives a series of calls and letters from collection agencies, but her adult son assures her, “Don’t worry about it Mom, I’m taking care of it.” In reality, he is spending her money at casinos.

That scenario plays out in a television commercial that the Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA) hopes will bring attention to “a growing epidemic” of financial abuse against seniors. [Click here to preview the commercial.](#) Social Services executives hope the message will reach the County’s approximately 213,679 residents who are over the age of 65 and encourage them to “trust but verify” when others help manage their finances. Seniors and the general public are urged to call the Adult Protective Services (APS) hotline at 1-866-225-5277 (1-866-CALL-APS) to report not only financial abuse, but also physical, emotional/psychological abuse, neglect and abandonment.

“It is estimated that nationally only one in 14 incidents of abuse against people who are 65 years of age or older is reported,” explained Lori A. Cox, director of SSA. “One reason may be that 70 percent of these offenses are committed by family, friends, or caregivers.”

She added that the primary reasons for low reporting statistics are fear, intimidation, and shame. Seniors and people with disabilities are often threatened into silence by their perpetrators. The other most common reason is embarrassment. Most people who are being financially exploited or abused are ashamed to report that a family member or close friend is taking financial advantage of them or abusing them.

“These are people who are closest to them, whom they believed they could trust with what they worked their entire lives to build,” said Cox.

To help vulnerable populations fight back, SSA has increased staffing in Adult Protective Services (APS), the department that receives calls reporting suspected abuse, according to Randy Morris, SSA’s director of Adult and Aging Services. He added, “APS staff can help seniors who may have been financially abused explore their financial situations and link them to organizations or services to assist them.”

Last year APS staff received 4994 calls of suspected abuse, and 4716 of these cases were opened for investigation.

Michelle Gauthier hopes her story will inspire others to make that call. Ms. Gauthier recently stopped working due to a chronic medical illness. She was unable to pay her rent and utilities on her limited disability income. She was given a 30-Day Notice to Vacate, and her utilities were shut off. APS was able to assist Ms. Gauthier with identifying and linking her to available benefits. As a result of the APS intervention, she is now able to access services that allow her to live within her means and maintain her housing.

Attorney Phil Foster, who is involved in an APS and Public Guardian case, believes Alameda County's campaign will make a difference in raising awareness about the epidemic of elder abuse. He commented, "I am honored to be part of the effort. This is the single most important issue that the elder population is faced with, yet there is very little attention and resources dedicated to it."

The SSA officially launched the month-long campaign with its presentation May 23 to the Alameda County Social Services Committee of the Board of Supervisors. ([Click here for the presentation.](#)) The campaign will consist of printed materials, bus shelter and cable TV commercial spots. The public awareness effort is designed to run throughout the month of June, which is nationally recognized as Elder Abuse Awareness month. In addition to local awareness efforts, the California Department of Social Services will launch a statewide campaign to raise awareness about the growing problem of elder abuse.

APS staff provide information year-round both at events for the general public and for professionals who work with the elderly and disabled.

**Please Note:** Both Michelle Gauthier and Phil Foster have agreed to participate in media interviews.

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