

From the Attorney General

PREVENTING AND PROSECUTING CASES OF ELDER ABUSE: A NEW RESOURCE



By Kelly A. Ayotte
New Hampshire Attorney General

Crimes against the elderly will increase proportionately to demographics that show that by the year 2010, one-third of New Hampshire's population will be 50 and older. In an effort to better respond to the needs of this growing population, the Elder Abuse and Financial Exploitation Unit has been created within the Office of the New Hampshire Attorney General. The creation of this Unit was partly in response to several findings by a legislative committee formed in 2003 to assess the needs of elderly and disabled adults in New Hampshire.

In 2004, the *Commission to Study Financial Exploitation of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities* found that there were two critical concerns that resurfaced during the course of their studies that warrant remedial efforts to improve the State's ability to protect the public and provide better services to elderly and disabled victims. First, the Commission found that there was a need for coordination among the various law enforcement and social service agencies that respond to and inves-

tigate cases of financial exploitation of elderly and disabled adults. Second, the Commission found that there was a need for more and better training of police officers at every level of law enforcement focusing on investigating and prosecuting financial crimes involving elderly victims.

The findings of the *Commission* were, in part, based upon a survey sent to law enforcement agencies throughout the state that sought feedback as to what, if any, barriers officers were experiencing in their efforts to intervene in cases of suspected elder abuse and financial exploitation. Resoundingly, the agencies cited a need for increased training.

In an effort to respond to the concerns raised, the Elder Abuse and Financial Exploitation Unit was created and Attorney Tracy Culberson was appointed as the state's first prosecutor whose duties are entirely dedicated to the prevention and prosecution of cases of elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Attorney Culberson began his law enforcement career as a police officer for the Goffstown Police Department in 1992 where he served as a

patrol officer, detective, and prosecutor. Upon graduation from law school in 2004, he was hired as an Assistant Hillsborough County Attorney where he prosecuted a wide range of cases and served on the Elder Abuse Task Force.

The Elder Abuse and Financial Exploitation Unit will undertake the efforts to accomplish the goals of increased coordination among local, county, and state law enforcement and social service agencies and will assist such agencies with increased training opportunities in this unique area of law.

I encourage members of the New Hampshire State Police and law enforcement officers throughout the state to contact the Elder Abuse and Financial Exploitation Unit at the New Hampshire Attorney General's Office at 271-0102 or by e-mail at tracy.culberson@doj.nh.gov should you have any questions. I would also encourage law enforcement officers to contact the Unit should you encounter any potential cases involving the abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation of elders where you feel that the Unit might be of assistance to you in your investigation or prosecution of the case. □

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