



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

## Serino Takes Action to Combat Elder Abuse

SUE SERINO June 15, 2015

| ISSUE: **AGING, SENIORS**



### **SERINO TAKES ACTION TO COMBAT ELDER ABUSE**

ALBANY—Senator Sue Serino (R, C, I—Hyde Park) brought the issue of elder abuse to the forefront today, memorializing the state to recognize the day, June 15, 2015, as Elder Abuse Awareness Day and passing critical pieces of legislation that have the potential to halt elder abuse in our state. Senator Serino is the NYS Senate’s Aging Committee Chair.

“Our seniors have spent their lives building and shaping our communities. Frankly, the thought of someone ruthlessly taking advantage of them when they’re at their most vulnerable is enraging,” said Senator Serino. “We have a responsibility to ensure that our seniors can enjoy their golden years free from abuse of any kind and I am proud to pass legislation that will enable them to do so.”

Monday’s Legislative Session began with the passage of [Senator Serino’s resolution memorializing Governor Andrew Cuomo to officially recognize June 15, 2015 as Elder Abuse Awareness Day](#).

The definition of elder abuse is broad in nature, ranging from neglect and financial exploitation to physical, sexual and emotional mistreatment. The resolution noted some startling statistics, saying that 5 million cases of elder abuse occur each year in the United States, but researchers estimate that 85% of those incidents actually go unreported. It went on to note that financial abuse alone can cost older Americans over \$2.6 billion each year.

“The crime of elder abuse is especially egregious because too often family, friends, neighbors and caregivers are the offenders and seniors either cannot or do not want to turn them in,” continued Serino. “The best way to combat the epidemic is to raise awareness so that individuals outside the seniors’ immediate circle know the signs and can intervene on their behalf.”

Earlier in the year, in an effort to combat the severe underreporting of elder abuse, Senator Serino introduced a bill ([S. 5328A](#)) that would authorize the State Office for the Aging to conduct a public education campaign to create awareness on the signs and symptoms of mistreatment. The bill passed in both the Senate and the Assembly today where it is sponsored by Assemblyman Steven Cymbrowitz, Chair of the Assembly’s Aging Committee.

The Senate also took aim at elder abuse by passing two more of Senator Serino's bills. One which would broaden the focus of the New York State Committee for the Coordination of Police Services to Elderly Persons by allowing the Committee to study and evaluate various initiatives (S. 5905). The goal being to provide innovative, useful tools for law enforcement to address criminal victimization of the elderly.

"Law enforcement has a critical role to play in preventing elder abuse," Serino pointed out. "By providing them the tools they need to take action, we can deter crime against the elderly and make real progress in combating abuse."

The bill has already passed in the Assembly where it is sponsored by Assemblyman Michael Miller. It will now be sent to the Governor to be signed into law.

The other (S. 5702), aims to ensure that our seniors are receiving the best, most appropriate treatment when they reside in long-term care facilities like nursing homes and assisted living centers by extending the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) for two years.

The LTCOP provides a critical advocate for seniors in these facilities by authorizing them to oversee managed long term care plans, to ensure that the seniors are actually receiving the highest quality of care.

"An Ombudsman helps residents and their families understand their rights to quality care and works to ensure that the dignity and quality of life of seniors in these facilities is maintained," Serino explained. "Their job is to investigate and resolve complaints and keep individuals and government agencies in the loop about potential issues impacting residents so the continuation of this program is key to protecting our seniors in long-term care."

This bill has also been sent to the Assembly where it is sponsored again by Aging Chairman, Steven Cymbrowitz.

Senator Serino noted that two of the bills she co-sponsors also passed in the Senate today.

First, [S. 639](#) would allow banks to refuse the dispersal of moneys when there is reason to believe that a vulnerable adult is being financially exploited.

“At a time when identity theft is on the rise across the board, our seniors are especially vulnerable to financial exploitation,” Serino noted. “This bill allows banks to take proactive steps to protect their customers and the assets they depend on to maintain their quality of life.”

Second, [S. 641](#) aims to deter elder abuse by expanding the definition of a caregiver to include those who take on that role voluntarily and will impose upon them stiff criminal penalties for inflicting harm on vulnerable seniors.

“Elder abuse is a crime of the most terrible kind and perpetrators need to face sanctions that reflect that,” maintained Serino. “The bill would outfit prosecutors and law enforcement with the tools they need to ensure that those responsible for harming our vulnerable seniors are held accountable.”

Both bills have been sent to the Assembly.

“Despite its devastating impact on New Yorkers from all walks of life, for far too long, the issue of elder abuse has avoided mainstream discussion and continues to fly under the radar,” Serino said. “Prevention and education play a vital role in protecting our seniors and halting abuse. The package of bills passed today will go a long way in bringing the issue of elder abuse to the fore and putting a stop to its devastating effects on New York’s seniors.”

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