



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

SERINO CHAMPIONS HUGE WINS FOR SENIORS

SUSAN SERINO June 15, 2017

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ALBANY, NY—With World Elder Abuse Awareness Day just around the corner, Senator Sue Serino (R, C, I—Hyde Park), today announced the passage of a significant package of bills she sponsors aimed at better protecting seniors from abuse and tangibly improving the lives of older New Yorkers across the state.

Notably, the package includes legislation that would create the first statewide elder abuse hotline, protect pensions from scam artists, empower seniors who wish to maintain control

of their finances, and create a local pilot program aimed at increasing access to transportation for area seniors who no longer wish to drive.

“Our seniors play an invaluable role in the fabric of our society, and we have a responsibility to ensure that they have access to the resources they need to live their lives to the fullest, at home, in the communities they worked so hard to build,” said Senator Serino. “Today, we took significant steps to ensure that our laws work effectively to empower our seniors and to provide law enforcement with the tools they need to prevent exploitation and abuse. Today, we are sending a clear message to seniors across our state that their needs, and their safety, remain a top priority.”

Earlier this year, Senate and Assembly Aging Chairs, Serino and Donna Lupardo joined forces to host a public hearing on elder abuse in the state to foster a better understanding of the prevalence of elder abuse here in New York, and understand how the state can better prevent mistreatment.

Because there is no streamline method of reporting—compounded by the fact that abuse too often happens at the hands of a person of trust, or a family member rendering victims unwilling or unable to report the abuse—statistics concerning elder abuse vary widely. For example, the NYS Office for the Aging estimates that for every one case of elder abuse, neglect, exploitation or self-neglect reported to authorities, five others go unreported. However, others claim that the number of unreported cases could be upwards of 20 or more for each case actually reported. At the March hearing, Gary Brown, Statewide Elder Abuse Coordinator for the Office of the Attorney General, testified that **a whopping 1 in 44 cases of elder financial abuse are ever reported to authorities.**

It was made clear at the hearing that more could, and should, be done to strengthen state laws to better protect vulnerable older New Yorkers.

Today, the following bills aimed at bolstering the law to better protect our seniors passed in the Senate:

- **S. 2154-A/A. 8160 (LUPARDO)** which would create an effective, efficient statewide hotline for the reporting of abuse of vulnerable older New Yorkers in an attempt to streamline the current process and increase reporting to directly combat abuse.
- **S. 6650** which would create a public awareness campaign alerting New Yorkers to the various options available to them when opening accounts with banking institutions to better protect their accounts from those seeking to exploit their finances.
 - Often, when older New Yorkers begin to seek assistance when paying bills or budgeting for their daily living expenses, they open joint bank accounts with relatives or caregivers. However, these joint accounts can leave them vulnerable to exploitation because they essentially provide equal rights to co-owners seeking to access the funds, meaning whoever is added to the account has the power to drain the funds in that account. This bill aims to better protect the accounts of older New Yorkers by ensuring the public is aware of additional banking options, like convenience accounts, that help account owners maintain firmer control over their finances.
- **S. 6431-A/A. 8385 (ABBATE)** which would better protect older New Yorkers from being taken advantage of by predatory companies offering advances on seniors' pensions—an issue that recently took center stage here in New York when the Governor announced that a deceptive pension advance company would be required to repay New York pensioners over \$500,000.
- **S. 6022** which would give law enforcement the tools they need to more effectively prosecute those who seek to steal from mentally impaired New Yorkers and seniors dealing with physical and mental infirmities.

- **S. 2155-A/A. 8229 (LUPARDO)** which would establish a transportation pilot program in counties like Dutchess and Putnam that would allow seniors who no longer wish to drive to turn in their vehicles to be used for credits toward affordable, long-term transportation options allowing them to maintain their independence and mobility.

- **S. 2137A/ A6715-A (BRINDISI)** which would empower adult care facilities housing low-income seniors to continue to provide housing, preventing residents from prematurely being moved into nursing homes.

- **S. 5415A** which would better inform older New York's of the services and benefits available to them by streamlining paperwork and increasing coordination between state agencies to ensure the needs of our state's seniors are more effectively met.

The bills have been sent to the Assembly.

*World Elder Abuse Awareness Day will be observed worldwide this Thursday, June 15, 2017. A resolution sponsored by Serino recognizing the day here in New York was passed on Monday, June 12, 2017.