

***Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation:
A Hidden National Tragedy***
OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CRAIG
June 14, 2001

First, I would like to thank my colleague Senator Breaux for allowing us to proceed with this very important hearing. I also want to thank our witnesses for being here this morning, with special thanks to Joanne Hopper from Fruitland, Idaho. Thank you, Ms. Hopper, for your courage and willingness to come to Washington D.C. and share your story with us.

Today we will shed light on an insidious aspect of Elder Abuse that remains largely hidden below the surface of public awareness - the abuses that tragically occur in non-institutional settings, including the elder's own home.

The physical and emotional consequences of Elder Abuse are devastating. There is ample evidence indicating that abuse shortens lives and can even end the life of a vulnerable victim. Because we are serious in our commitment to promote secure, independent living for our seniors, we must address this difficult issue. No one should live in fear of being abused or mistreated. No One! Not a Child. Not a Senior!

It is important to emphasize that these cases are not just isolated incidents. National statistics indicate that 470,000 cases of elder abuse were reported to authorities nation wide in the year 2000. Over 2,100 of those cases were reported in my own state of Idaho for the same year. Perhaps more disturbing is the fact that these statistics represent only 1 in 5 cases reported to state and local officials.

The challenges facing us in fighting Elder Abuse are formidable. Our investigation has revealed that State efforts to address these situations are often ineffective. The perpetrators are seldom prosecuted and front line responders often lack the training needed to adequately address the problem. Various Government agencies all too often fail to work in a collaborative and focused manner.

Today, we seek to determine how existing state and federal efforts might be enhanced to promote collaborative and multi-disciplinary approaches in resolving these very complex cases.

Existing federal resources can and should be targeted toward providing more technical training and assistance in the collaborative identification, investigation, and prosecution of crimes perpetrated against the elderly. The DOJ recently awarded the State of Idaho a "Stop" violence against women grant. I would like to see similar opportunities for states to apply for grants specifically related to Elder Abuse prevention.

Thank you again, Senator Breaux, for convening this hearing. This issue has been ignored for far to long. I am eager to hear from our Witnesses.