

Special Committee on Aging

Shattering the Silence:

Confronting the Perils of Family Elder Abuse

OPENING STATEMENT

of

SENATOR JOHN BREAU

Good morning. I would like to thank all of you for attending today's investigative hearing. I would also like to thank the Committee's Chairman, Senator Larry Craig, for his support throughout this investigation. Most importantly, I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today. Your testimony will assist the Committee greatly in building a strong record on the need for solutions to combat the growing problem of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The Committee has conducted a number of hearings over the years on the subject of elder abuse. The Committee has examined elder abuse in homes and institutions. The Committee has examined physical and sexual abuse, as well as neglect of the elderly. Moreover, the Committee has examined various forms of financial exploitation of the elderly.

Today, we will examine the subject of family elder abuse - one of the most sinister forms of elder abuse. We will be looking at the very people who violate a profound trust, a trust given by an elder to his or her flesh and blood. Family elder abuse is difficult for any of us to fathom, but sadly it occurs. Forty years ago, none of us wanted to believe that anyone, much less a family member, could or would abuse a child. Now, we realize that child abuse does occur. As a result of attention to child abuse prevention at the state and federal levels, numerous programs aimed at addressing this issue have been developed and successfully implemented. I believe we are in the same situation today with regard to our older Americans. It is almost impossible to believe that a family member would physically abuse or neglect a frail, older person, or take advantage of them financially. However, our witnesses this morning will dispel that belief.

One of the difficulties in examining family elder abuse is the lack of available data that defines its nature and quantifies it. The only incidence and prevalence study on the topic of elder abuse suggests that family abuse is, by far, the largest category. Adult Protective Services programs in the 50 states probably have the best available data addressing abuse within family units. The 2000 report of the National Association of Adult Protective Service Administrators reflects that 61.7% of the perpetrators of elder abuse are from families, *as you can see from the chart we prepared*. This APS data was published in 2003. For purposes of this hearing, I asked APS to prepare an interim report on data collected since the year 2000. I was disappointed to learn that there are no plans to repeat the APS study at this point. This fact underscores the

difficulties in obtaining data elder abuse. However, APS did agree to report on some data collected in 32 states. Today, I am releasing that APS information which continues to highlight the importance of finding creative solutions to preventing elder abuse.

Although there is little data on the subject of family elder abuse, we know from the Committee's previous work that one out of four Americans will be a victim of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation at some point. We know that 500,000 to five million seniors are abused every year. Further, we know that reported abuse is only the "tip of the iceberg," since 84% of elder abuse is believed to go unreported. Clearly, the Congress and the Nation must find innovative solutions that will protect our greatest generation from abuse.

I believe that the Elder Justice Act, S. 333, that I introduced along with Senator Orrin Hatch and which is co-sponsored by 30 additional senators, is just the type of jump-start needed to begin the complex task of developing research, training and programs that can aid in combating elder abuse. I am pleased that we have a companion bill in the House, H.R. 2490, a bi-partisan bill sponsored by Representatives Rahm Emmanuel, Roy Blunt, Peter King and approximately 60 additional representatives. Also solidly behind the bill are more than 190 organizations working toward passage of the bill through the Elder Justice Coalition. Today's hearing will, once again, emphasize the need for this kind of legislation to help us ensure the protection of all older Americans against elder abuse.

Before introducing the witnesses, I would like to note that I received a statement for the record from the Representatives Emanuel, Blunt & King and would like to thank them for their support. I would also like to recognize other Senators for any opening remarks.