



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## News for Immediate Release

April 18, 2013



There are a variety of resources available on the UJS website including downloadable video and audio clips and a graphic.

## Supreme Court's Elder Law Task Force will tackle growing abuses to older Pennsylvanians

**HARRISBURG** – The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has formed an Elder Law Task Force, chaired by Justice Debra Todd, to study the growing problems involved in guardianship, abuse and neglect, and access to justice. The task force has been charged by Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille with recommending solutions that include court rules, legislation, education and best practices.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the “over-65 population” is now larger in terms of size and percentage of population than it has been in any previous census. Pennsylvania currently ranks fourth in the nation in percentage of people 65 and older. As of the 2010 census, almost 2 million Pennsylvanians – 15.4 percent of the state’s population – were over 65 and that number is projected to continue to increase substantially through the year 2020.

“The increased population of older Pennsylvanians has strained the resources of our courts and their ability to provide services to these individuals,” Chief Justice Castille said. “The needs of this growing population will continue for years to come, especially in regards to guardianships, elder abuse and access to justice. Now is the time to put in place solutions that will allow older Pennsylvanians to age without worries that they will be abused or their money will be taken.”

The task force is made up of [38 elder law experts](#) including judges, lawyers and social workers. The task force will have three subcommittees, one devoted to appointment and qualifications of guardians and attorneys, a second on guardianship monitoring and data collection, and a third on elder abuse and powers of attorney. The work of the group will take approximately one year.

“As a society, we have increased concentration on child abuse, but the issue of elder abuse has not kept pace,” said Justice Todd. “This task force is the judiciary’s attempt to study the issues under its purview and make adjustments now, before the numbers of older Pennsylvanians and the commensurate jump in abuse, occurs.”

Justice Todd said a quick review of stories in Pennsylvania newspapers illustrates the growing problem:

- A 64- year old Lancaster amputee depended on a personal care aide to help him bathe, dress and fix meals. Instead, police allege, the aide neglected him so badly that he developed skin ulcers deep enough to reach his muscle and bone. When he finally checked into a local hospital, doctors found severe wounds on his leg, foot, back and genitals. He eventually lost his remaining leg to amputation.
- A Dauphin County man stole nearly \$380,000 from his 89-year-old great aunt, a retired teacher. He was her only relative, lived with her and had her power of attorney. He cashed his great aunt's pensions and social security checks. He was arrested and charged with theft.
- A dying woman in Bucks County who was about to enter a nursing home asked her neighbor to look out for her personal finances. Rather than pay the nursing home bills, the neighbor allegedly spent the money on numerous luxury vacations, casino trips, country club and golf club memberships and expensive jewelry. The neighbor also used the money for home repairs and business expenses for her husband. She was arrested and faces five felony-related theft charges that could put her in jail for 35 years.

“At least these cases were eventually reported,” Justice Todd said. “The U.S. Administration of Aging’s National Center on Elder Abuse estimates that for every one case of elder abuse reported, five more go unreported. This is shameful, and we need to do better.”

According to research funded by the National Institute of Justice, almost 11 percent of people ages 60 and older, or 5.7 million individuals, suffered from some form of abuse in 2009.

Financial exploitation costs older Americans \$2.5 billion nationally, as estimated by the MetLife Mature Market Institute and the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. Abuse of power of attorney or guardianship, fraudulent deed conveyances, home repair contractor fraud, credit card and bank account fraud and unauthorized use, pressured sales of unsuitable products, lottery scams, and illegal and exploitative telemarketing and collections practices are just examples of the many forms of elder financial exploitation.

Tragically, elder abuse is also deadly. According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, victims of abuse, neglect and financial exploitation have three times the risk of dying prematurely.

# # #

Contact: [Amy Kelchner](#), 717-231-3328

