



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

### News for Immediate Release

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### **Pa. Supreme Court Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts Recognizes World Elder Abuse Awareness Day**

*Highlights statewide conference on Exploring Alternatives to Guardianship*

**HARRISBURG** — The Pa. Supreme Court Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts today recognized World Elder Abuse Awareness Day by highlighting the importance of identifying and understanding elder abuse for one of Pa.’s most vulnerable populations.

“Paying attention to the warning signs of neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, as well as financial exploitation is absolutely critical in protecting seniors and vulnerable adults. We know that for each case of elder abuse that gets reported to authorities, there are often dozens more that never come to light,” said Pa. Supreme Court Justice Debra Todd. “Elder abuse can happen to you, your neighbor or your loved ones – but we can help protect seniors by remaining vigilant and learning the warning signs.”

Warning signs can include unusual changes in behavior or sleep; fear or anxiety; broken bones, bruises and welts; poor hygiene, nutrition or dehydration; lack of medical aids (glasses, walker, teeth, hearing aid, medications); unusual changes in bank account or money management; fraudulent signatures on financial documents; and unpaid bills.

In Pennsylvania, statewide reports of elder abuse have increased by 80 percent over the past five years. Isolation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has also contributed to making older Pennsylvanians vulnerable to abuse.

Building community supports is a critical step towards preventing elder abuse. Pennsylvanians can help by:

- 1) **Learning the signs** of elder abuse.
- 2) **Preventing isolation.** Call or visit older loved ones and ask how they are doing on a regular basis.
- 3) **Providing respite breaks** for caregivers.
- 4) **Signing up to be a friendly visitor** to an older person within the community.
- 5) **Encouraging bank managers** to train tellers on how to spot elder financial abuse – and asking doctors to talk with all older patients about possible family violence in their lives.

If someone you know displays any of these signs of abuse, take action immediately. Report suspected abuse as soon as possible by contacting the **Pa. Statewide Elder Abuse Hotline at 1-800-490-8505**.

In some cases, abuse may not be present but a person with limited or impaired mental functioning may need additional support or a guardian.

Guardianship essentially means that when an adult of any age is deemed incapacitated by a court, a professional or family guardian may be appointed who is responsible for making certain decisions on their behalf. The nature of these decisions can include financial, medical and personal matters the incapacitated person has been determined unable to make for themselves.

The decision to pursue guardianship is one that should not be taken lightly, and Pennsylvania law requires that alternatives to guardianship be explored first.

To learn more alternatives to guardianships, caregivers, guardians, attorneys, and members of the media can register to attend Montgomery County's 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Elder Justice Conference, on **June 17 from 8:30 a.m. until 4 pm**. This free conference is being held both virtually and in person and will provide an in-depth look at a variety of alternatives to guardianship that may be appropriate for older adults, in an effort to maintain their autonomy and reduce court involvement. Participants can [register here](#).

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The Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts was established by the Pa. Supreme Court in 2015 to advise the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) regarding the implementation of the Elder Law Task Force's Report and Recommendations regarding best practices, judicial rules, and legislation to benefit elder citizens of the Commonwealth.

The mission of the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts is to identify and address elder justice issues affecting the Commonwealth's elders. The Advisory Council and OEJC exist to identify areas of need and challenges faced by elders, and to improve the ability of Pennsylvania courts to meet those needs.

