

Michigan Elder Abuse Task Force: A Short Description of Activities

■ By Drew Walker

Michigan's Task Force on Elder Abuse was established by Governor Granholm through Executive Order No. 2005-11 in May of 2005. The Task Force is led by the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging and involves a partnership between the Department of Community Health, the Department of Human Services, the Office of Financial and Insurance Services, and the Michigan State Police.

The Task Force on Elder Abuse has held three meetings to date, and future meetings are scheduled to take place on the first Thursday of each month from October 2005 through May 2006. Public input is welcomed and encouraged from all concerned parties. Time has been allocated during each meeting for public comment. Public feedback on the draft of the Task Force's final report will be widely solicited in March and April of 2006. The final report will be delivered to the Governor by May 31, 2006.

The Task Force on Elder Abuse is charged with an important step in the development of a coordinated, comprehensive response to the physical and emotional abuse and financial exploitation of Michigan elders. The Task Force will review and recommend educational initiatives, policies, and legislation that are sensitive to the situation of aging in Michigan. The Task Force recommendations will focus on implementing social and cultural changes that will benefit Michigan through effectively preventing and prosecuting cases of elder abuse, as well as raising public sensitivity and awareness of the issue.

The Task Force will work to deliver the following products in relation to elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation:

- A Review of Existing State Efforts Toward Prevention and Prosecution
- A Spelled-Out Set of Pressing Issues and Significant Challenges
- A Review of Out-of-State Laws, Policies, and Practices
- Recommendations on Developing a Reference Database
- Recommendations Regarding Enhancement Mechanisms for Intercommunication between Private and Public Sectors
- Recommendations on the Establishment of a Communications Network
- A Review of and Advice on the Development of Effective Investigative Teams
- Improvements in the Possible Scope and Depth of Research
- Recommendations Regarding Educational Approaches for Enforcement Professionals
- Recommendations Regarding a Plan to Expand Public Awareness

The Task Force is divided into four main committees to achieve these deliverables. The Public and Private Sectors Communication and Coordination Committee (PPS) will help guide the Task Force in developing and enhancing successful public and private sector efforts in dealing with various aspects of elder abuse. The Investigative Teams and Law Enforcement Training Committee (ITLET) will work to develop recommendations regarding enhancing the effectiveness of law enforcement and prosecution efforts. The Public Awareness

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Committee (PA) will study successful public awareness strategies in other areas and work to determine which strategy would best address elder abuse as it exists in Michigan today. The Database, Research, and Legislation Committee (DRL) will help guide information gathering and analysis for the Task Force as a whole, as well as develop various other issues related to database, research, and legislative work in Michigan and other states.

Task Force meeting themes will include:

- Learning from existing state-wide initiatives in dealing with elder abuse
- The construction of local investigative teams
- Needs and successes prosecuting cases of elder abuse
- Guardianship and conservatorship
- The difficult issues surrounding vulnerability or competence and autonomy vs. protection

- Surrogate decision making and financial products
- Law enforcement strategies regarding financial exploitation
- Physical abuse/neglect in relation to medical examiner and care staff recognition of elder abuse
- The successful marketing of elder abuse issues and initiatives

For further information about the Task Force on Elder Abuse, please contact Drew Walker at (517) 241-0851 or WalkerDr@Michigan.gov, visit the Spotlight site www.ihcs.msu.edu/elder, and attend a Task Force meeting!

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