

SHELLY HETTLEMAN
Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Health and Human Services Subcommittee

Pensions Subcommittee

Vice Chair
Rules Committee



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 203
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3131 · 301-858-3131
800-492-7122 Ext. 3131
Shelly.Hettleman@senate.state.md.us

The Senate of Maryland

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN SB797 TASK FORCE ON PREVENTING AND COUNTERING ELDER ABUSE

In 13 years, for the first time in U.S. history, we can expect there to be more people older than 65 than younger than 18. The US Census estimates that the number of Marylanders 65 or older is expected to double by 2030- about 1.2 million people, or *nearly one in every five* Marylanders. The fastest growing population are people ages 85 and older – people who are at increased risk for a variety of illnesses and dementias resulting in greater risk for abuse and exploitation.¹

Every year, an estimated 5 million older Americans are victims of elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation and unfortunately- that may be the tip of the iceberg. According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, an estimated 93% of elder abuse cases go unreported each year.² Underreports may be caused by a number of factors including an older person's fear of retaliation by the offender, reluctance to disclose the incident because of shame or embarrassment, concern they will be institutionalized, dependency on the offender, and an inability to report because of physical limitations or cognitive impairments.³

In the United States, one in 10 older Americans is the victim of abuse, typically by someone they know and should be able to trust, often a member of their own family. Very few older adults live in nursing homes and assisted living facilities- the majority of older adults, 93.5%, live in the community.⁴ Older adults often rely on caregivers and professionals to meet their daily needs- whether that is for medical advice, financial transactions, or even to get assistance with meals and self-care. Seniors interact with technology and are susceptible to financial exploitation and are frequent targets of internet and phone scams.

This bill will create a task force to prevent and counter elder abuse. Protecting the safety of vulnerable adults and balancing one's right to self-determination requires skilled insight. There's a wise sentiment that proports that the closer you are to the problem, the closer you are to a solution. It is imperative that those closest to these issues collaborate, share perspectives, and make recommendations on policy and practice. I will defer to our panelists and written testimony to share their expertise and insights on elder justice.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/cb18-41-population-projections.html>

² <https://www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-elder-abuse>

³ Baker, P. R., Francis, D. P., Hairi, N. N., Othman, S., & Choo, W. Y. (2016). Interventions for preventing abuse in the elderly. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, (8).

⁴ Toth, M., Martin Palmer, L., Lawren E. Bercaw, Johnson, R., Jones, J., Love, R., Voltmer, H., and Karon, S. (2020) <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/understanding-characteristics-older-adults-different-residential-settings-data-sources-trends-0>

We must be proactive in making recommendations to safeguard the health and welfare of aging Marylanders. I urge a favorable report on SB797 and I thank you for your consideration.