



HOUSTON-GALVESTON AREA COUNCIL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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H-GAC RECOGNIZES JUNE AS ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS MONTH

H-GAC Encourages Residents to Be Aware of the Signs of Elder Abuse

HOUSTON, TX – The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) recognizes June as Elder Abuse Month. H-GAC encourages residents and caregivers to be aware of the signs of elder abuse and to learn how to report any instances or attempts.

Elder abuse refers to intentional or negligent acts by a caregiver or trusted individual that causes harm to an older person. The abuse can take on many forms, including neglect, isolation, physical or sexual abuse, financial abuse and exploitation, or emotional and psychological abuse. Elder abuse is one of the fastest-growing crimes in the United States. According to the FBI, the incidence of elder abuse is expected to double by 2030.

“Crimes against seniors are tragically underreported, leaving many seniors at the mercy of their abusers,” said Jacqueline Pontello, lead program director of the Elder Justice Program. “Seniors themselves are often hesitant to report crimes, sometimes out of embarrassment but most often out of fear that they will be seen as incapable of managing their own affairs or because the abuser is a family member or caregiver on whom the senior depends. Let’s honor our elders by being alert to – and reporting – any signs that they are being abused or mistreated.”

Here are the top five most common signs of elder abuse:

1. Unexplained cuts, burns, bruises, scars, broken bones, or other injuries.
2. Person looks malnourished or messy – with unwashed hair or dirty clothes – or is living in a hazardous, unsafe, or unclean environment.
3. Sudden changes in behavior, such as becoming withdrawn, moody, or negative when normally cheerful; stops participating in activities they previously enjoyed; or displaying physical signs of trauma like rocking back and forth.
4. Broken or missing eyeglasses/frames, missing medical aids – such as walkers, dentures, hearing aids, or medications – or displays physical signs of punishment or being restrained.
5. Unexplained or drastic changes in financial situation, such as unpaid bills, odd or uncommonly large purchases, late mortgage or rental notices, or a home eviction notice. May also present a high level of anxiety about money or personal finances.

In 2018, H-GAC launched the Elder Justice Program to improve the services and coordinated care available to victims of elder abuse in the Houston-Galveston region. H-GAC staff provide safety planning, information and resource referrals, and legal advocacy and civil legal representation to victims of elder abuse and protective family members. Services are designed to protect and support victims, regardless of whether they choose to report the abuse to police or Adult Protective Services.

“To all of our older friends, know that there *is* help if a bad contractor didn’t finish your job, if crazy charges keep

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appearing on your bank statements, or if someone is physically hurting you,” said Pontello. “We promise not to judge or nag you; we’ll just help take immediate steps to stop the damage, protect you from future loss, and try to recover what’s been taken. Best of all, the services are always confidential and 100% free to seniors.”

The Elder Justice Program currently provides free services to crime victims ages 65 and older and who live in Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, and Montgomery counties. This summer, H-GAC plans to expand the Elder Justice Program to seniors living in Chambers, Liberty, Matagorda and Wharton counties. Program services are made possible by the Office of the Governor, Criminal Justice Division, using Victims of Crime Act funds from the U.S. Department of Justice.

For more information about the Elder Justice Program, contact Kelly McCann at 713-301-5250 or Jackie Pontello at 346-500-4620.

To report elder abuse, call the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services abuse hotline at 1-800-252-5400. If it is an emergency or life-threatening situation, call 911.

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