

Elder Abuse Working Groups

A Review and Comparison of 15 State Working Groups

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I. Introduction

Over the past five years, a growing number of states have convened or continued efforts to strengthen formal elder abuse working groups in response to the increase in public awareness of elder abuse. This document examines the establishment, purpose, and current status of these groups.

Expanding on a 2010 study by Anetzberger and Balaswamy, which detailed the development, organization, and outcomes of temporary state-level elder abuse summits from 1993 to 2006, this paper examines 15 states with established elder abuse working groups. The 15 state working groups reviewed here are representative and not intended to be exhaustive. The Anetzberger and Balaswamy study defined elder abuse summits as time-limited and expressly formed to develop a set of recommendations for addressing elder abuse. This paper expands upon that definition to include groups formed for a variety of purposes that are not necessarily time limited. For the purpose of this paper, an elder abuse working group is an entity such as a task force, council, commission, or non-profit organization, convened to address elder abuse issues at the state level. Furthermore, this paper illustrates that these established working groups can provide guidance for each other and future working groups on how to create and sustain the most appropriate structure depending on a state's needs and resources.

Of these 15 working groups, 10 are task forces, two are councils, two are commissions, and one is a non-profit organization that merged from two existing bodies (see Appendix for a listing of these groups). Some were established as long-term or permanent working groups, while others were intended to be temporary. Groups considered short-term are those that have ended, have an end date, have not continued their work/evolved in some capacity, or their tenure is unknown. All others are considered long-term working groups. While each

group focuses on elder abuse in some capacity, there are similarities and differences between how the body was created, the leadership, its mission, achievements, funding, and challenges.

This review is a description of state-by-state information concerning recent, past, and current activities of state elder abuse working groups. This is not a paper that includes suggestions of merit or descriptions of promising practices. This is a descriptive survey of activities in the last five years that have been state initiated to examine the performance of elder justice actions at the state level in their particular time and context. It describes information that was found on select states concerning elder abuse working groups that was available in the public domain. This review is possibly the platform for a more rigorous study particularly of the outcomes of policy choices and the resources required to conduct.

The information and discussion presented is an opportunity to invite dialogue amongst state based elder abuse initiatives as we find that states have been mobilizing to put their own resources together to address elder abuse as a systems issue. These state working groups have largely formed without direct reference to broader policy change such as the federal [Elder Justice Act](#) and subsequent publication of the [Elder Justice Roadmap](#). Some states have acted separately on guardianship or other issues through projects such as WINGS, but this paper focuses on broader state task groups and commissions. It is our hope that this paper might create greater collaboration and focus on the state government role in elder justice as well as further study and analysis.

II. State Working Groups

A. Short-term elder abuse working groups

i. Alaska: Elder Task Force

Type of Group and Formation

The Alaska Supreme Court convened the Alaska Elder Task Force in 2014 due to State Chief Justice Dana Fabe's interest in examining current judicial practices and improving their system (Judge D. Winfree, personal communication, August 4, 2015). Chief Justice Fabe provides a staffer for the Task Force and additional costs for members come from the unified Alaska Court System budget.

Purpose

The purpose of the Task Force is to identify areas where the Alaska Court System can improve its response to matters involving the elderly population (Judge D. Winfree, personal communication, August 4, 2015). The Task Force focuses on the judiciary's response to cases of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Current Status

The Task Force is currently looking at state processes surrounding guardianship and conservatorship (Judge D. Winfree, personal communication, August 4, 2015). As it has expanded, the Task Force formed subcommittees to address the focus areas. The Resource Development Subcommittee plans to develop an on-line video education project for guardians. However, due to insufficient funds, this project has been delayed. The subcommittee is seeking additional funding through partnerships to continue this project. The Monitoring/Elder Fraud Subcommittee is charged with examining the process by which cases are reviewed to ensure that a qualified person reviews all guardianship/conservatorship paperwork. Since limited face-to-face contact by judicial officers and court visitors are problematic in remote locations, a subcommittee is working to provide best practice recommendations to ensure better protection of these individuals.

ii. Colorado: Elder Abuse Task Force

Type of Group and Formation

The Colorado Elder Abuse Task Force was formed in 2012 due to heightened concerns that Colorado was one of three states at the time that lacked mandatory reporting and also had a grossly underfunded Adult Protective Services system (Colorado Department of Human Services, 2012). Legislation led to the formation of the Task Force but stipulated that, “members of the Task Force shall serve without compensation and shall not be entitled to reimbursement for expenses” (S. 78, 2012).

Purpose

The Task Force was charged with first studying and reporting on the mistreatment and exploitation of at-risk elderly adults, and then providing recommendations for General Assembly consideration (S. 78, 2012).

Current Status

In the first year, the Task Force created multiple specialized teams and met more than eight times (Colorado Department of Human Services, 2012). After a thorough review of existing research and deliverables, the Task Force completed a final report in November 2012. They concluded that mandatory reporting would identify elders who were being mistreated, deter non-reporters and perpetrators, and assist law enforcement and prosecutors. In its final report, “The Task Force unanimously endorses passage of mandatory reporting to law enforcement...The majority of the resources identified in this report address the system infrastructure needs required to be in place when mandatory reporting is adopted. Those needs include additional county caseworkers and associated staff, state quality assurance personnel, emergency services, training costs, and data system costs” (Colorado Department of Human

Services, 2012, p. 46). Senate Bill 111 was signed into law in May 2013, requiring mandatory reporting in Colorado.

iii. Maine: Task Force on Financial Exploitation of the Elderly

Type of Group and Formation

In January of 2014, Attorney General Janet T. Mills formed the Task Force on Financial Exploitation of the Elderly, a law enforcement based task force, after recognizing that financial crimes against the elderly were increasing (Maine Office of the Attorney General, 2015).

Purpose

The mission of the Task Force is to examine the barriers to prosecution of financial crimes and to make recommendations to improve the criminal justice response (Maine Office of the Attorney General, 2015).

Current Status

Initially, the Task Force asked experienced professionals about the barriers to prosecution of financial crimes against the elderly and for advice on what could be done to improve the investigation and prosecution of financial exploitation and other crimes (Maine Office of the Attorney General, 2015). From these conversations, they identified six barriers to prosecution of financial crimes against seniors: financial crimes are viewed as more difficult and resource intensive to investigate; financial crimes committed by family members are often viewed as family matters rather than criminal matters; there are competing priorities for limited resources; the state's statutes could better protect victims from financial exploitation; the victim's dependence on a family member; and the lack of training for professionals. The Task Force made several recommendations concerning statutory changes, judicial case management, as well as criminal rule changes based on these barriers. The tenure of the Task Force is unknown.

iv. Massachusetts: Elder Protective Services Commission

Type of Group and Formation

Massachusetts formed the Elder Protective Services Commission in 2013 to assist in being adequately prepared to prevent, recognize and respond to cases of elder abuse (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2014).

Purpose

The Commission was charged with investigating and studying elder protective services and making recommendations to enhance these services where appropriate and necessary (H. 3538, 2013).

Current Status

First, the Commission studied the elder protective services system including: strategies to increase public awareness of elder abuse and reporting; funding needs for elder protective services; best practices for prevention and detection of elder abuse; the high cost of financial exploitation investigations and expanding affordable legal services; as well as the development of elder abuse multi-disciplinary teams to provide consultation on adult protective services. In 2014 the Commission then produced a report recommending: the development of a financial abuse specialist team; the development of professional resources for programs for education and prevention programs; expansion of training resources for those who serve the elder marketplace; use of wellness and primary care visits as an opportunity to identify those at risk for abuse; expansion of access to mental health services; development of protocols to respect elder self-determination and capacity; focus on prevention; support and development of training for elder protective service workers; standard training for mandated reporters; development of protocols for referral to and from law enforcement; establishment of an elder abuse response team advisory

committee and pilot programs; and review of the guardianship programs in Massachusetts (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2014).

v. North Carolina: Task Force on Fraud Against Older Adults

Type of Group and Formation

North Carolina established the Task Force on Fraud Against Older Adults in 2011 due to the prevalence of fraud committed against the elderly (Worsham, 2015). Prior to the Task Force's formation, the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research presented research and recommendations on elder fraud to the state legislature in 2011, from which legislation was passed to create the Task Force.

Purpose

The Task Force was charged with strengthening laws to provide older adults a broader system of protection against abuse and fraud; establishing a statewide system for reporting incidents of fraud and mistreatment of older adults; identifying opportunities for partnership among the Banking Commission, the financial management industry, and law enforcement agencies; and granting the Attorney General authority to initiate prosecutions for fraud against older adults (S. 449, 2011).

Current Status

The original Task Force established in 2011 provided a set of 8 recommendations including tougher laws, better reporting, training for banks and law enforcement, and the power to prosecute fraud against older adults statewide (Legislative News from Representative Chuck McGrady, 2013). In 2013, an extension of the Task Force was charged with reporting on the efficacy of any of the Task Force's recommendations that were adopted (S.B. 140). During the 2013 legislative session, Senator Bingham used the recommendations of the Task Force to bring

about enactment of Senate Bill 140, “to increase the recognition, reporting, and prosecution of those who would defraud or financially exploit older adults, and to continue the Task Force on Fraud Against Older Adults” (Worsham, 2015).

vi. South Dakota: Elder Abuse Task Force

Type of Group and Formation

The South Dakota Elder Abuse Task Force was formed in 2015 by the South Dakota legislature (S. 168, 2015). The Elder Abuse Task Force is staffed and funded by the Unified Judicial System, and cannot receive more than \$15,000. The bill was encouraged by Chief Justice of the Supreme Court David Gilbertson, who for several years had urged lawmakers to focus on the issue of elder abuse (Burbach, 2015).

Purpose

The Task Force was formed to study the prevalence and impact of elder abuse in South Dakota, as well as to make recommendations to the legislature on policies and legislation to effectively address the issue (S. 168, 2015).

Current Status

The Task Force is set to release a final report of findings from their study in 2015 and make recommendation to the 2016 legislative session. The Task Force currently has an end date of January 1, 2016 (S. 168, 2015).

vii. Tennessee: Elder Abuse Task Force

Type of Group and Formation

The Tennessee Elder Abuse Task Force was established in 2014 and was extended in 2015 (S. 1852, 2014 and S. 198, 2015).

Purpose

The Task Force is charged with assessing if elders and other vulnerable adults in Tennessee are receiving services and resources that adequately address their needs (S. 1852, 2014 and S. 198, 2015).

Current Status

The Task Force, extended in 2015, is examining services and resources that address the needs of the elderly and other vulnerable adults, as well as barriers to these services and resources. After a thorough examination, the Task Force will develop recommendations to address those problems. The Task Force's Public Policy Final Report states that, "After reviewing remedies to reduce the number of individuals who suffer from abuse, they will recommend needed state policies or responses, legislative remedies and give direction toward coordinating services to support and protect this population" (Public Policy Final Report, 2014, p. 3).

B. Long-term working groups

i. Alabama: Interagency Council for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

Type of Group and Formation

The Alabama Interagency Council for the Prevention of Elder Abuse was formed in 2012 after the passage of S.B. 262. The Council is subject to the availability of appropriations, and as of 2014 had not received any funds (Department of Examiners of Public Accounts, 2014).

Purpose

The Council was formed to define the roles and responsibilities of participating agencies, recommend additional Council members as needed, develop a long-range plan to address the needs for elders at risk for abuse, and ensure interagency collaboration to facilitate policy

decisions and implementation of a plan for addressing elder abuse (Department of Examiners of Public Accounts, 2014).

Current Status

Resulting from the work of the Council, S.J.R. 86 was passed in 2013 urging the Council, “to establish and implement a long range plan to prevent elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation” (S.J.R. 86, 2013). To date, the Council has drafted a new Criminal Statute, “Protecting Alabama’s Elders Act,”(Act 2013-307); developed an Elder Abuse Protection Toolkit; established a Volunteer Program; developed a professional Speaker’s Bureau and Law Enforcement Protocol Guide; and identified elder abuse liaisons for each state agency (Department of Examiners of Public Accounts, 2014).

ii. Arizona: Task Force Against Senior Abuse

Type of Group and Formation

The Arizona Task Force Against Senior Abuse (TASA) was formed in 2011 under former Attorney General Tom Horne, who was passionate about protecting elders and the large senior population in Arizona (T. Chenal, personal communication, September 11, 2015). TASA continues under the current Attorney General, Mark Brnovich, and is set to continue operating indefinitely. While it does not receive a separate budget, TASA did receive specific funding to hire a criminal prosecutor, a civil investigator, and a criminal investigator who are all assigned to handle senior abuse cases. The other members of TASA include employees who are already funded through the Attorney General’s Office.

Purpose

TASA has three areas of focus including Medicaid fraud and abuse, consumer protection matters, and criminal cases (T. Chenal, personal communication, September 11, 2015). Within

the three focus areas, TASA conducts prosecution (criminal and civil), legislative efforts, and outreach and education.

Current Status

Since its inception in 2011, TASA has focused several projects on education and outreach. TASA gives presentations throughout the community, and has developed and shared resources in relation to scams, identity theft, healthcare fraud, elder abuse, and consumer tips. TASA also provides education to professionals, and developed first responder guidelines for elder abuse that includes a checklist of things to do, first steps, and questions to ask. Additionally, TASA developed a helpline for people with elder abuse issues and receives roughly 1,000 calls per year. Calls are assigned internally to the Attorney General's office or referred to other organizations. TASA also developed a summary of registries, so anyone interested in hiring a caregiver can check the registry for past records of elder abuse (T. Chenal, personal communication, September 11, 2015).

In addition to education and outreach, TASA has impacted state legislation regarding elder abuse (T. Chenal, personal communication, September 11, 2015). TASA drafted, lobbied, and successfully passed the Arizona Revised Statute 44-1276, which helps to protect seniors from scams. Furthermore, with the help of TASA members, Healthcare Statute ARS-36-144 was introduced, requiring any business entity that provides homecare to provide certain information to the consumer such as a description of services, cost of services, name of the caregiver, and a background check on the caregiver.

iii. Iowa: Elder Abuse Task Force

Type of Group and Formation

The Iowa Elder Abuse Task Force is an evolving entity that emerged after outrage over statewide cuts in long-standing elder abuse programs (L. Hildreth, personal communication, July 9, 2015). Since late 1996, prior to the formation of the Task Force, the Iowa Department of Aging had convened the Elder Abuse Committee, an Ad Hoc committee of statewide elder abuse stakeholders. Many of the members of the Elder Abuse Committee became formal members of the Iowa Elder Abuse Task Force.

On July 29, 2014, a public meeting was convened with the Department of Human Services, Department of Inspections and Appeals, Department of Public Health, Department on Aging, and the Office of the Attorney General (L. Hildreth, personal communication, July 9, 2015). Each organization provided a brief overview on how legislation passed impacted their role in the adult abuse system. Advocates pushed for legislation and passed House File 2387 in 2012, and created the Task Force. No appropriations were made to support the efforts of the Task Force. The Iowa Department on Aging provided staffing, and Donna Harvey, Director of the Iowa Department on Aging, facilitated the Task Force. Additional staffing is provided by Linda Hildreth, Iowa Department of Aging's Elder Abuse Program Director.

Purpose

What began as a short-term effort has evolved into a long-term collaborative effort (L. Hildreth, personal communication, July 9, 2015). House File 2387, passed in 2012, mandated the Iowa Department on Aging to partner with the Department of Inspections and Appeals, the Department of Human Services, the Iowa Attorney General's Office, and others to conduct a comprehensive review of occurrences of and laws relating to the abuse, neglect, or exploitation of individuals sixty years of age or older in the state. In 2013, State File 446 required the Task

Force to review the 2012 Task Force Report, develop an implementation plan for those recommendations, and make any additional recommendations as necessary.

Current Status

The work of the Task Force led to five legislative actions in 2014 including re-establishment of the Office of Substitute Decision Maker, securing elder abuse prevention and awareness funding, establishing an Involuntary Discharge Specialist within the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, creating the Iowa Uniform Power of Attorney Act, and establishing an elder abuse definition and law for civil elder abuse. Following these legislative actions, the Departments involved agreed that it would be beneficial to continue working collaboratively among the operational committees.

iv. Minnesota: Minnesota Elder Justice Center

Type of Group and Formation

Minnesota created a non-profit organization, the Minnesota Elder Justice Center, in 2014 by joining two initiatives, The Vulnerable Adult Justice Project and The Minnesota S.A.F.E. Initiative (Minnesota Elder Justice Center, 2015a). Several organizations provided the initial funding necessary to launch the Minnesota Elder Justice Center, including: AARP Minnesota, Care Providers of Minnesota, LeadingAge of Minnesota, Minnesota Board on Aging, Offices of Minnesota County Attorneys, and Wells Fargo Advisors (Minnesota Elder Justice Center, 2015b). As a non-profit organization, the Minnesota Elder Justice Center's funding significantly varies from the other elder abuse working groups discussed in this paper.

Purpose

The Minnesota Elder Justice Center's mission is to mobilize communities "to prevent and alleviate abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of elders and vulnerable adults" (Minnesota

Elder Justice Center, 2015a). As a nonprofit, the Minnesota Elder Justice Center is an example of an entity that has flexibility and addresses multiple issues related to elder abuse.

Current Status

The Minnesota Elder Justice Center identifies service gaps in the protection of vulnerable and/or older adults; identifies gaps and flaws in the underlying public policies; educates public officials about current and emerging issues through presentations and publications; invites public officials to present data, updates on current policy, and proposals for policy change; identifies issues where additional research is necessary and engages law students in research; and conducts and cooperates in professional education and public awareness efforts (Minnesota Elder Justice Center, 2015c).

v. Nevada: Elder Abuse Task Force

Type of Group and Formation

Nevada's Task Force was initiated by prosecutors and formed by Nevada's law enforcement, prosecutorial, and social service agencies to assess and improve the protection of seniors by improving investigation and prosecution of elder abuse (Advisory Council for Prosecuting Attorneys, 2015). The Task Force formed due to frustration that cases were not being prosecuted and victims were not being treated as victims (Nevada Legislature, 2007).

Purpose

Nevada's Elder Abuse Task Force is focused on improving the investigation and prosecution of elder abuse (Advisory Council for Prosecuting Attorneys, 2015). There are three goals of Nevada's Task Force: (1) prevention of elder abuse through public awareness; (2) compiling accurate statistics available to lawmakers; and (3) achieving effective investigation and prosecution of elder abuse crimes (Nevada Legislature, 2007).

Current Status

The Task Force is currently conducting a resource inventory and needs assessment of the senior protection systems in two counties and rural Nevada (Advisory Council for Prosecuting Attorneys, 2015). The objectives are to develop better communication between agencies responsible for investigating and prosecuting crimes against seniors; provide public education and raising awareness of fraud, abuse, neglect, and exploitation; improve investigation and prosecution of cases; and create a Senior Protection Unit at the State level that can act as a resource for local authorities and handle complex cases. Previously, the Task Force focused on a public awareness campaign that domestic violence and stealing from one's parent or a person in your care is a crime (Nevada Legislature, 2007).

vi. Ohio: Elder Abuse Commission

Type of Group and Formation

The Ohio Elder Abuse Commission was formed in 2009 and emerged from a Transition Task Force resulting from the Ohio Department of Aging/Attorney General Elder Abuse Task Force that was created out of the Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services' Summit on Elder Abuse (G. Anetzberger, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

Purpose

The Commission was formed to improve education efforts, boost research, and raise awareness (Mike DeWine Ohio Attorney General, 2015). The Commission is also in charge of providing a forum for improving elder justice throughout the state in addition to identifying funding and programming needs and finding solutions.

Current Status

The Commission has spent a significant amount of time addressing the Adult Protective Services system (McElroy, 2015). In 2015, they are diversifying their efforts to elder abuse in facilities, criminal justice involvement, and working with allied professionals.

vii. Pennsylvania: Elder Law Task Force

Type of Group and Formation

The Pennsylvania Elder Law Task Force was formed to study the issues surrounding elder abuse, guardianships and access to justice that older Pennsylvanians were facing (The Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania, 2014). Prior to the Task Force, Chief Justice Castille, Zygmunt Pines, the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania, and the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts' (AOPC) concluded that Pennsylvania courts needed to change the ways they address the needs of elders (The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, 2014). Thus, Madame Justice Todd, at the request of the Chief Justice, convened a Task Force in 2013 to address the particular concerns regarding elders and be proactive about addressing the impact of the growing population of elders in Pennsylvania's court system.

Purpose

The mission of the Task Force is to review current practices and problems, examine promising practices in other states, and deliver a blueprint of recommendations to address the needs and challenges of Pennsylvania's aging population (The Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania, 2014).

Current Status

The Task Force "issued a 284-page report with 130 recommendations to enhance the way Pennsylvania elders interact with the state court system and are protected in cases involving abuse, neglect, guardianship and other matters" (The Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania, 2014). The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania approved the Task Force's recommendations to

create an Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) (to assist the Supreme Court in implementing the recommendations in its report), and to create an Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts (to advise the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force, serve as a liaison to the executive and legislative branches, and communicate with the AOPC and Supreme Court regarding the implementation of the TF's recommendations and other matters involving elder justice). Both entities were established in 2015.

viii. South Carolina: Adult Protection Coordinating Council

Type of Group and Formation

In 1991 a Joint Resolution mandated the South Carolina Long Term Care Council to convene an Advisory Committee on adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation (Adult Protection Coordinating Council, 2013). The Committee identified problem areas in the adult protection system and made comprehensive recommendations to improve the system in the areas of training, employment issues, advocacy, public awareness, care issues, coordination and legal issues. In 1993, the Advisory Committee completed and signed into law the Omnibus Adult Protection Act. Article Three of the Act created the Adult Protection Coordinating Council, and amendments to the Act in 2012 provided technical corrections and revised membership and duties of the Council.

The South Carolina Adult Protection Coordinating Council is thought to be the first of its type in the United States (Adult Protection Coordinating Council, 2013). It is staffed by the Office of Long Term Care and Behavioral Services of the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. The Council resulted from deep concern about the need for continued coordination and cooperation among the entities involved, specifically in the adult protection system. The South Carolina Adult Protection Coordinating Council appears to be the only group

discussed that intentionally includes consumers and/or families of consumers in their group. Currently, “the duties of the council are subject to the appropriation of funding and allocation of personnel sufficient to carry out the functions of the council. Staffing for the council must be provided by the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services” (Omnibus Adult Protection Act, 2014).

Purpose

The Council is in charge of coordinating efforts of those in the adult protection system, and is committed to training and education (Adult Protection Coordinating Council, 2013).

Current Status

The Council created a manual that provides information for professionals and the general public regarding vulnerable adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation (Adult Protection Coordinating Council, 2013). They also developed an online training for mandatory reporters that is publically available on the webpage for the Lieutenant Governor’s Office on Aging. The Council has been involved with efforts to move forward with a volunteer vulnerable adult guardian ad litem program. Additionally, a Committee was established to review recommendations in two reports from Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities regarding community residential care facilities and to consider action steps to address them.

C. Unsuccessful Attempts at Forming Working Groups

i. Virginia

Virginia was unable to establish an Elder Abuse Working Group in 2012 when S.J.R. 53 was withdrawn from further consideration. It would have directed the Virginia State Crime Commission to study the ways to prevent, deter, and punish financial exploitation of elderly and incapacitated adults; roadblocks to identifying and prosecuting these crimes; and what could be done to increase the possibility of obtaining restitution for victims (S. Bosch, personal

communication, June 12, 2015). Senator Ebbin decided to strike S.J.R. 53 after learning about a similar bill from then Senator Mark Herring, S.B. 222, which Senator Ebbin felt was sufficient. S.B. 222 was incorporated into another piece of legislation, S.B. 431 from Senator Richard Stuart, which passed the Senate but died in the House Appropriations Committee.

ii. West Virginia

West Virginia also was unable to form an Elder Abuse Working Group when H.C.R. 130 and S.C.R. 44 failed to pass in 2013 (H.C.R. 130, 2013; S.C.R. 44, 2014). The former requested that the Joint Committee on Government and Finance study the feasibility of updating state laws that strengthen protections against elder abuse, exploitation, and fraud. The latter requested the Joint Committee on Government and Finance to study the safeguarding of older West Virginians against abuse, fraud, and financial exploitation; the strengthening of protection against such crimes through reviewing and updating state laws; how other states define financial exploitation and how they may integrate certain elements of other states' laws into West Virginia law; and whether current law provides county prosecutors with the tools they need to track down and expose scams having an impact on older West Virginians.

III. Discussion

A. Trends in Elder Abuse Working Groups' Areas of Focus

Each state elder abuse working group addresses multiple issues; however, working groups tend to focus on particular issues that reflect the greatest needs in that state. The two broad areas that almost every group focuses on are the judiciary response to elder abuse and the adult protection system. Many states have narrowed the focus of the working group to address specific issues within these two topic areas. States that focus on judiciary and criminal justice responses to elder abuse include: Alaska, Arizona, Maine and Nevada. States that focus on the

adult protection system include Alabama, Colorado, Iowa, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The South Dakota Task Force, Minnesota Elder Justice Center and Pennsylvania Elder Law Task Force do not fit into these categories. The South Dakota Task Force primarily focuses on studying the prevalence and impact of elder abuse in the state. As a non-profit, the Minnesota Elder Justice Center has flexibility to address a wide range of issues related to elder abuse issues. The Pennsylvania Elder Law Task Force's focus is on how the courts can address issues involving elder abuse, guardianship and access to justice. The focus of each working group is listed in the appendix.

B. Elder Abuse Working Groups' Type and Scope of Work

Elder abuse working groups also share similarities and differences in their type and scope of work. Each state's working group has a varying number of participants from a variety of backgrounds and settings. However, South Carolina appears to be the only group that intentionally includes consumers and/or families of consumers. Providing a multi-disciplinary perspective tends to be highlighted as important amongst the working groups. Participants of a working group may impact the type of work a group conducts and how that work is conducted.

A prominent initial step among working groups was first conducting a study of current systems and then making recommendations based on their findings. Several of the working groups were given a certain period of time to study a particular topic and were then asked to make recommendations. These states include Colorado, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota. Some groups, such as Alabama, Iowa, and Colorado, went on to develop an implementation plan for the recommendations. In addition to studying current systems and making recommendations, some working groups created resources for professionals and/or the public. States that successfully created resources or plan to create resources include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Massachusetts, and South Carolina.

C. Impact of the Formation of Working Groups

The type and scope of work may also be impacted by how it was formed. Groups formed through legislation tend to have more structured guidelines that stipulated the groups work. For example, the working groups in Colorado, Iowa, and North Carolina had certain guidelines described in the legislation that stipulated what the groups were to study. They were given a certain amount of time to produce reports, and either completed their scope of work or further legislation determined their next steps. While legislation may limit the scope of study and tenure of the group, it also provides an opportunity and platform for a group to evolve with certain supports. Entities created through the initiative of an attorney general's office, a state supreme court, or a collaborative of organizations appear to have fewer restrictions in the type of work conducted and the tenure of the group. For example, Arizona and Alaska have no end date for their Task Forces and have more flexibility in the projects and issues they are addressing.

D. Funding of Working Groups

It is clear that many of the elder abuse working groups are operating within existing resources rather than with a conventional line item budget. Staffing often comes from existing employees who must share their official time and energy with the working groups. Working groups are restricted by limited budgets and staffing, making it challenging to address elder abuse issues. The Alaska, Arizona, and Iowa working groups specifically mentioned a lack of funding and/or resources as a challenge to accomplishing their work. Based on the available information, it was not possible to discern distinct differences or results of a working group based on the source or availability of funding.

While working groups are producing high quality work including helpful recommendations and resources, ensuring adequate funding to implementing these recommendations is critical. For example, after the Colorado Task Force completed their

recommendations, resources were needed to implement the mandatory reporting efforts in the state. As state budgets have taken a hit in the past several years, it is necessary to question how implementation will occur, as well as the potential these working groups could achieve with additional funds.

IV. Conclusions

Despite challenges, these groups are working to address prominent issues of elder abuse in their state. While progress is being made, further research including evaluation of working groups' activities, leadership, and operations such as the frequency and format of meetings may enhance their impact. Additionally, more research is needed on the relationship between recommendations and implementation. Each group is striving to protect older victims of abuse throughout their state. However, the work does not stop with recommendations, demonstrating there needs to be more understanding of how a state proceeds to ensure the elder abuse working groups' efforts are implemented and utilized.

Appendix

Elder Abuse Working Groups by State				
State	Name of Group	Origin of Group	Type of Group	Focus of Group
Alabama	Alabama Interagency Council for the Prevention of Elder Abuse	Legislative Action	Council	Prevention of elder abuse and establishing a long-range plan to address the needs of at-risk elders
Alaska	Alaska Elder Task Force	State Supreme Court	Task Force	Guardianship and conservatorship
Arizona	Task Force Against Senior Abuse (TASA)	Attorney General	Task Force	Crime, Medicare fraud, and consumer fraud
Colorado	Colorado Elder Abuse Task Force	Legislative Action	Task Force	Mandatory reporting
Iowa	Iowa Elder Abuse Task Force	Legislative Action	Task Force	Studying laws related to protecting seniors
Maine	Task Force on Financial Exploitation of the Elderly	Attorney General	Task Force	Barriers to prosecution of financial crimes
Massachusetts	Elder Protective Services Commission	Legislative Action	Commission	General elder protective services system
Minnesota	Minnesota Elder Justice Center	Collaborative of Organizations	Non-profit Organization	Address a wide range of issues related to elder abuse issues
Nevada	Nevada Elder Abuse Task Force	Collaborative of Organizations	Task Force	Investigation and prosecution of elder abuse
North Carolina	Task Force on Fraud Against Older Adults	Legislative Action	Task Force	General state adult protective service system with an emphasis on fraud
Ohio	Ohio Elder Abuse Commission	Attorney General	Commission	General state adult protective service system
Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania Elder Law Task Force	State Supreme Court	Task Force	Issues involving guardianship, elder abuse and access to justice
South Carolina	South Carolina Adult Protection Coordinating Council	Legislative Action	Council	Coordinating efforts within the adult protective system
South Dakota	South Dakota Elder Abuse Task Force	Legislative Action	Task Force	Prevalence and impact of elder abuse
Tennessee	Tennessee Elder Abuse Task Force	Legislative Action	Task Force	General state adult protective service system

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