

**Legislative Budget and Finance Committee**

**The Commonwealth's Network of Elder Abuse Task Forces**

**Report Presentation by Dr. Maryann Nardone at June 17, 2015, Meeting**

Good morning. House Resolution 2014-929 directed the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LB&FC) to study the existing network of elder abuse task forces in the Commonwealth and to assess the feasibility of expanding the network statewide. National associations, including the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) have endorsed formation of multidisciplinary teams or task forces as a way to more effectively address elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. More recently, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Elder Law Task Force recommended the Pennsylvania General Assembly mandate and fund elder abuse task forces statewide. At the time, limited information was available about the Commonwealth's existing task forces.

Most state adult protective service programs involve multidisciplinary elder abuse teams or task forces, though few are mandated. Only seven states (Colorado, Florida, Iowa, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, and Wyoming), have some type of statutory requirement for elder abuse teams or task forces. Typically, these states rely on state employees to conduct protective service investigations. In Pennsylvania, the Department of Aging (PDA) works closely with local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and with Temple University's Institute on Protective Services to help establish elder abuse task forces based on locally identified needs. But, the county decision on whether to establish such a task force is totally voluntary.

Earlier this year, LB&FC staff surveyed all Pennsylvania Area Agency on Aging directors to determine if elder abuse task forces currently operate in their planning and service areas. Based on these survey responses, we found that almost 80 percent of Pennsylvania's older adults reside in counties with an elder abuse task force or team that includes formal collaboration of prosecutors, law enforcement, and older adult protective service staff.

The 31 counties without elder abuse task forces or teams are mostly rural, less populous counties. Almost all of these 31 counties report they work closely with local district attorneys, law enforcement, and community service agencies, and in this way can effectively address the needs of elder abuse victims within their county.

Pennsylvania's existing elder abuse task forces vary from county to county. They differ in their primary purpose and focus, and such differences influence their membership. In general, the existing task forces fall into two distinct groups: those reviewing specific protective service cases to plan and carry out coordinated investigations or care planning and those that do not review specific cases for investigation and care planning but rather focus on community elder abuse awareness and professional training events.

All of the Commonwealth's elder abuse task forces include AAA directors and/or protective service staff and district attorneys and/or their staff. About 80 percent also have a county sheriff, and/or local municipal law enforcement, and/or Pennsylvania State Police serving on the task force. Three task forces include judges, but these task forces are not involved in reviewing

specific cases or carrying out investigations, which could be perceived as a possible conflict of interest if a local judge was involved, according to the National Center for State Courts.

We found Pennsylvania's elder abuse task forces have very limited direct funding to support their work. About 30 percent of the counties with designated elder abuse task forces expressed concern about the absence of earmarked federal and state funding to support their task force activities.

Federal funds for prevention of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation amounted to only \$243,000 for FY 2014-15 for the entire state—an amount that has not only failed to keep up with inflation, but is actually below our 2004 allotment of \$253,320. State Lottery funds earmarked for elder abuse education and prevention amounted to \$298,000 in FY 2014-15, with an additional \$902,000 earmarked for protective services in the state aging block grant.

With regard to recommendations, we recommend that the Pennsylvania Department of Aging continue to support voluntary efforts of local communities to establish elder abuse task forces that meet local community identified needs. In view of the existing informal arrangements in place in areas of the state without formal elder abuse task forces, we concluded little additional value would be added to services for older adults by requiring such areas to formalize a task force. Such a requirement might also divert staff time and resources from essential services.

We also recommend that PDA advocate for increased federal funding for prevention of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Finally, we recommend that the Department and the Pennsylvania Unified Judicial System may wish to consider sponsoring a statewide elder abuse public awareness and education campaign. Such a statewide effort could avoid the potential conflict of interest present when the local judiciary participates in existing elder abuse task forces given their role in review of individual cases.

We thank the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, in particular Secretary Osborne and her staff for their cooperation and assistance with our study. We also thank Temple University's Institute on Protective Services and its staff, including Ron Costen, who played a major role in the development of several of the Commonwealth's elder abuse task forces. Finally, we thank all of the Area Agency on Aging directors and Crystal Lowe, the Executive Director of P4A. Without their valuable assistance, we would not have been able to successfully complete this study.