

Report Highlights

The Commonwealth's Network of Elder Abuse Task Forces

House Resolution 2014-929 directs the LB&FC to study Pennsylvania's existing elder abuse task forces (EATFs) and assess the feasibility of expanding them statewide. The Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA) works closely with Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), which are responsible for investigating elder abuse reports and assisting its victims, and Temple University, which provides required training for protective service workers and supervisors and works collaboratively with local AAAs to establish EATFs. In 2014, EATFs came to the attention of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Elder Law Task Force, though at the time, limited information was available about them.

We found:

- **The National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) endorse multidisciplinary teams or task forces to more effectively address elder abuse given the complexity of such cases and the many diverse, though complementary, programs existing to address it.** Such task forces may include aging and disability networks, mental and physical health providers, domestic and sexual assault programs, law enforcement agencies, and the courts. They may elect to perform various roles, such as review of specific cases to coordinate investigations and care planning or public awareness and professional training.
- **Most state adult protective service programs have multidisciplinary teams or task forces, but only seven (Colorado, Florida, Iowa, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas and Wyoming) have a statutory mandate.** In such states, state employees typically conduct investigations. Task force mandates also do not always apply statewide—52 of PA's 67 counties, for example, would not meet Texas' population threshold for a required team.
- **Almost 80 percent of PA's older adults reside in counties with an EATF that includes prosecutors and law enforcement.** Counties without an EATF are mostly rural and less populous (13 have fewer than 10,000 older adults). They report having established cooperative relationships with their courts, district attorney's (DA) offices, local law enforcement, and community health and human service providers, with more than one-third indicating there is no current need for an EATF.
- **All task forces have AAA directors and/or protective service supervisors, DAs or their staff as members. About 80 percent also have law enforcement officers.** Only three (Cambria, Huntingdon, and Montgomery) include local judges, which is not surprising as NCSC emphasizes courts should not participate in EATFs that investigate abuse or design care plans. About half of PA's task forces focus on such activities.
- **Typically, AAA and/or DA offices coordinate EATFs, with multiple agencies sharing such responsibilities for over half of them.** Activities are performed on a "volunteer" basis by about two-thirds of the EATFs. One county (Washington) has full-time EATF staff. About 30 percent of counties without EATFs see limited protective service and law enforcement staff time as an obstacle to EATF formation.
- **With a few notable exceptions (Montgomery and Schuylkill) only limited funding (mostly state Lottery funds) is available for EATF activities, such as public awareness and professional training.** Federal Title VII funds for prevention of elder abuse, such as supporting multidisciplinary elder justice activities, are limited. In FFY 2014, PA received \$242,944, which is less than its 2004 allotment, and less than what it expends to support Temple's work. NAPSA has recommended Congress set aside funds under the Victims of Crime Act for adult protective services similar to what occurs for child abuse.
- **Recommendations:**
 - PDA continue to support voluntary EATFs to address local needs.
 - PDA and the courts consider a statewide elder abuse public awareness campaign involving the judiciary.
 - PDA advocate for increased federal funding for prevention of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.