

***Safeguarding our Seniors:
Protecting the Elderly from Physical and Sexual Abuse in Nursing Homes***

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CRAIG

March 4, 2002

We are here this morning to examine the serious and growing problem of physical abuses of our nation's most vulnerable citizens. I want to begin by thanking Senator Breaux for convening this very important investigative hearing. We began this committee's investigation on Elder Abuse last year, including a discussion of abuses that happen in the elder's own home. I am pleased to see that

this committee is continuing to explore different aspects of the problem, including instances of abuse that occur in nursing homes.

The challenges we face in remedying nursing home abuse are formidable. Employees of nursing homes with the legal duty to report suspected occurrences of abuse often fail to report to appropriate state and local agencies, including law enforcement. When cases are reported, there is often a long delay. Evidence is allowed to perish. And when prosecutors finally get these cases, they have trouble acquiring reliable testimony from victims and other witnesses.

I'm hoping to hear today how existing state and local efforts to combat abuse in nursing homes might be enhanced by more collaborative approaches. In the state of Idaho, we have interagency protocols related to elder abuse responses both at the state and local level that have been quite effective. These formal protocols have the signatures of top officials in Adult Protection, the Ombudsman program,

survey agencies, law enforcement, and prosecutors, demonstrating their commitment to work together on these cases. The protocols require specific reporting, facilitate collaborative investigations, and allow the exchange of client information between professionals acting on behalf of victims.

Additionally, existing federal resources should be better targeted to provide technical training in the identification, investigation, and prosecution of crimes perpetrated against the elderly in nursing homes and in the community. A high level of competence and expertise is necessary to effectively take on these very difficult cases.

I look forward to hearing the testimony today.