



Chairman's Opening Remarks July 30th Hearing

"The U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging will now come to order.

Today's hearing is meant to bring attention to a heartbreaking issue.

People spend years planning, working, and dreaming of an enriching and fulfilling retirement. Never does that dream include possible abuse or neglect of a friend, loved one, or themselves.

Unfortunately, elder abuse and neglect happen every day, and too often, our seniors suffer in silence. A recent study from AARP shows that only 1 in 14 cases of elder abuse are reported.

Even when it is reported, it can be difficult to prosecute these crimes. Survivors of abuse are often unwilling or unable to testify. This hesitancy can be compounded by not having a trusted support system and the perpetrator of the abuse having an existing relationship with the abuse victim.

Combating abuse and neglect by stopping fraud and scams is important work for seniors across the country, and it's especially important to folks in my state of Florida where we have such a large and vibrant senior population. Fighting back against frauds and scams has also been a priority of mine, as both Florida's governor and now as a U.S. senator.

One of the first bills I fought to make law after I was elected to the Senate in 2018 was the Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence (TRACED) Act to combat abusive robocalls.

The TRACED Act gives regulators more time to find scammers, increases civil forfeiture penalties for those who are caught, promotes call authentication and blocking adoption (technology that prevents these calls from reaching consumers in the first place), and

brings relevant federal agencies and state attorneys general together to address hurdles to criminal prosecution of robocallers who intentionally flout laws.

Put simply, the TRACED Act protects Americans, especially our seniors, from abusive robocalls.

While having the TRACED Act signed into law by President Trump in 2019 was a win in the fight against fraud-based abuse and neglect, victimization continues and we must do more.

We need an all-hands-on-deck approach at the local, state, and federal levels to protect our seniors.

We need to ensure continued support for programs that help train those who interact with our seniors on how to identify signs of physical, mental, or financial abuse of elders, and provide services for those who are victims of such horrific treatment.

We also need to build out and support programs that stop elder abuse and neglect before it happens, especially on a state and local level. This includes adult day services, transportation services, and meal delivery programs.

These programs serve a dual purpose as they help build the necessary trust to create a safe environment for reporting abuse when and if it occurs.

Many of these essential programs that work on identifying and preventing elder abuse and neglect are overseen and authorized by the Older Americans Act.

For 60 years, the Older Americans Act, known as the OAA, has helped countless seniors through social connection and life-affirming support programs. Over 10 million older Americans a year are helped by programs covered by the OAA.

I am proud to work with Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Health Education, Labor and Pensions Chairman Bill Cassidy and Ranking Member Bernie Sanders to lead the fight for the reauthorization of this important piece of legislation, which is a critical tool in our arsenal to fight against abuse and neglect of our elderly population.

The OAA supports family caregiving services, the National Center on Elder Abuse, and provides vital legal assistance programs to connect vulnerable seniors with the resources that they need.

It also helps support local in-home-meal delivery services, which not only provide much needed nutritional services, but also serves as a critical touch point for seniors.

Interactions like those had with an in-home-meal delivery services provider are sometimes the only contact a senior may have with someone who can recognize signs of abuse or neglect. It also builds trust and a sense of connection that may otherwise not exist.

Thankfully, we are working with the Trump administration, who understands the value of these programs.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. recently made a point to highlight how important these in-home meal services are by being the first sitting HHS secretary to visit and deliver meals himself.

I'm grateful we have a leader in the White House and a leader at the Department of Health and Human Services who are prioritizing the safety and health of older Americans and are partners in this fight to ensure members of our aging community have a healthy and fulfilling life.

My hope is that with this hearing, we can draw attention to the people and programs working on the front lines to address this crisis of elder abuse, as well as the victims we are failing if we fail to act. I look forward to hearing from these leaders in the aging support space and gaining knowledge from their experience as we work together to address and stop this crisis in its tracks."

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