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Elder Justice Coordinating Council

Statement of William F. Benson

National Policy Advisor

National Adult Protective Services Association

September 24, 2013

Good afternoon. I am Bill Benson. I serve as National Policy Advisor to NAPSA, the National Adult Protective Services Association. NAPSA is the voice for the nation's state and local APS administrators and staff. NAPSA is honored to operate the first-ever ACL-funded National Adult Protective Services Resource Center.

NAPSA is greatly appreciative of the EJCC's work to provide a coordinated and meaningful executive branch response to the plague of elder abuse. We thank you for your leadership. We previously submitted a response to the recommendations put forth to the EJCC by the Federal Interagency Elder Justice Working Group this past May. All the proposals put forth are good, important and NAPSA supports them.

We want to underscore Xinqi Dong's comments this morning about the interrelationships among multiple forms of abuse and the importance of recognizing self-abuse as a key risk factor for other forms of abuse.

There are several key points we believe important to make in the limited time available today.

- We applaud the leadership of Assistant Secretary Greenlee for her leadership in addressing elder abuse and in her support for APS including the resource center but also the soon-to-be-announced project to establish a national APS data system. We also strongly believe that the need for a federal office specifically focused on APS is even more urgent today.
- APS is the front line for adult victims of abuse. In every community in America APS provides victim services for frail elders and vulnerable younger adults who have been abused, neglected or exploited. The system must be involved, supported and funded to improve direct services to victims and to meet the challenges of increasing numbers. APS, together with many services of the aging services network are in fact a big part of that "catcher's mitt" for victims that was suggested this morning. True, there are holes in the webbing of that mitt but it needs shoring up and strengthening not built from scratch.

- The criminal justice response urgently needs improving but must not be at the expense of the overwhelming majority of victims whose abuse does not rise to the level of prosecutable crimes, but who are suffering and need protective services prevent further abuse and to stabilize their lives.
- NAPSA's partners in the Financial Exploitation Advisory Board believe the federal government could improve the nation's response to financial elder abuse by helping APS work more effectively with financial institutions to allow greater access to client information and to enable more effective interventions. Far greater clarity is needed for the sharing of information between financial institutions and APS that mitigates any privacy concerns. We are very pleased that on this very day the Consumer Financial Protection Board is providing guidance to banks on the sharing of information. We also want to note that NAPSA's annual meeting is in St. Paul, Minnesota next week and will close with our National Financial Elder Abuse Summit, as it has for the past three conferences.
- Data sharing across federal systems, such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, VA, needs to be facilitated to improve client outcomes as well as efficiencies in interventions.
- Research should focus on improving the services and interventions APS provides. We recommend developing and testing benchmarks for APS practice similar to what was done in CPS.

Our final point is to sadly sound an alarm. 34 states – 68% – rely upon the Social Services Block Grant to finance their APS system either in part or virtually in whole. These states spent \$180.4 million in SSBG funds on APS in FY 2010 (the most recent data HHS provides). That is almost twice the authorization for APS in the Elder Justice Act of which not one cent has been appropriated.

Two very serious credible threats arose last week to SSBG. Legislation was introduced in the Senate last week to address child sex trafficking. The offset for the cost of this legislation would be SSBG. The second is a measure from the House Budget Chairman to suspend the U.S. borrowing limit in exchange for major spending cuts including eliminating SSBG.

We mention this only because it must be made clear that eliminating SSBG would be catastrophic to many states' APS programs. Several state APS administrators state unequivocally that it would end APS in their states.

Outside of law enforcement, APS is THE ONLY intervention for elder abuse available in all states. Its loss would be devastating. There is no alternative in place. Just imagine a proposal that could wipe out child protective services in any state.

Thank you allowing us to comment today.