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Ohio Department of Commerce Recognizes World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Ohioans encouraged to watch for signs of elder financial exploitation

(COLUMBUS, Ohio) – In recognition of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15, the Ohio Department of Commerce, with support from the Ohio Department of Aging, is asking Ohioans to keep a watchful eye for signs of elder financial exploitation and to promptly report possible abuse to appropriate officials.

According to the National Council on Aging, one in 10 older Americans are victims of elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation every year; however, experts believe elder abuse is significantly underreported.

“Older Ohioans must be protected from those who want to cause them harm,” said Governor Mike DeWine. “I encourage all Ohioans to watch for signs of elder abuse and report suspected abuse immediately to the proper authorities.”

The percentage of Ohio’s older population is growing, according to data from the Ohio Development Services Agency. By 2020, the agency projects 17.4 percent of Ohioans will be 65 and older, and the proportion increases to 21 percent by 2030.

“As Ohio’s population ages, the number of elder financial abuse cases is likely to rise,” said Ohio Department of Commerce Director Sheryl Maxfield. “Many older adults have accumulated some wealth throughout their lives through savings, pensions, and other investments. In addition, social isolation and declining health leave many in our older population vulnerable to fraud and scams.”

“Every Ohioan, regardless of age or ability, deserves to live with dignity and respect, and free of physical and financial fear and harm,” added Ohio Department of Aging Director Ursel J. McElroy. “We are proud to partner with the Ohio Department of Commerce to battle and ultimately stop the financial exploitation of vulnerable citizens.”

Changes in an older adult’s behavior or activity may indicate potential elder financial exploitation. Possible warning signs include:

- Dropping existing relationships and adding strangers as new “friends.”
- A new friend showing an excessive interest in the older person’s finances or accounts.
- A new friend keeping family or friends from speaking to the elderly person.
- The older person ignoring repeated calls or other contacts by family and friends.
- Large amounts of money missing from the senior’s investment or bank accounts.

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- Unusual charges appearing on the senior's monthly credit card statement, or unpaid bills, collection letters, or missing valuable possessions.

The Ohio Department of Commerce offers resources to help protect older Ohioans:

- If you need help contacting state-chartered banks, credit unions, or other consumer finance companies, call the Division of Financial Institutions' Office of Consumer Affairs at 866-278-0003.
- If you suspect someone may be a victim of investment fraud, call the Division of Securities' Investor Protection Hotline at 877-683-7841.

In addition, certain professions regulated by the Department of Commerce now have increased or new reporting requirements as a result of changes to Ohio's adult protective services laws in 2018 and 2019. The laws increased the number of mandatory reporters who must report cases of suspected elder abuse and financial exploitation to county departments of job and family services offices when they have "reasonable cause to believe" an adult is being abused, neglected, or exploited. For a complete list of mandatory reporters, see the publication "[A Guide to Protecting Ohio's Elders.](#)"

Additional state and local resources include:

- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Adult Protective Services in each county. A list of offices is available [here](#).
- Ohio's Adult Protective Services Referral Line at 855-OHIO-APS (855-644-6277).
- Ohio Attorney General's Office Elder Justice Unit at 800-282-0515. (As Attorney General, Mike DeWine established the Elder Justice Unit in 2014 to improve victims' access to services and to focus on the investigation and prosecution of elder abuse cases.)
- The Ohio Department of Aging's website includes a resource to learn more about the many types of elder abuse, recognize the signs of physical or financial abuse and scams, and report suspected abuse. Visit www.aging.ohio.gov/elderabuse.
- Local law enforcement office in each community.

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