



## Strengthening Wisconsin's Response to **ELDER ABUSE**

BY ATTORNEY GENERAL BRAD SCHIMEL

Over the next two decades, Wisconsin's population of adults 65+ will increase by more than 72 percent. This changing population trend is common among other states across the country, and many experts have dubbed it the "Silver Tsunami."

As Wisconsin's attorney general, I want to be ready for this coming

tsunami, and we need to prepare key partners, such as law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, victim service providers, financial institutions, senior living facilities, advocacy organizations, and many others, for the increased challenges that lie ahead for seniors. For this reason, I've assembled a multi-disciplinary Task Force on Elder Abuse. In addition to studying the

impact of elder abuse in Wisconsin and assessing ways to improve outcomes for this growing population of citizens, the task force will develop strategies to address barriers in investigation and prosecutions of elder abuse, strengthen consumer protection for seniors, and create recommendations for improved cross-system communications.



There are many different forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual, and financial, and studies have shown that one in nine seniors report experiencing some form of abuse or neglect in the past 12 months. The trends in data from adult protective service workers across Wisconsin have shown a steady increase in elder abuse in the last decade, and there's no sign of it slowing as this population grows.

Sadly, instances of financial abuse, one of the most common forms of elder abuse, are increasing each year. Criminals prey on older adults because they know how vulnerable they are to these types of attacks, and the types of exploitation tactics criminals are using are increasingly becoming more sophisticated and brazen. I saw it firsthand earlier this year when an elderly friend was contacted by an individual posing as the government, claiming that my friend owed back taxes. The "government official" threatened to

arrest my friend if he did not comply with certain demands.

My friend grew up in a generation where he didn't have debt and feared getting into trouble. The criminals even spoofed the phone number calling him to pretend to be the local law enforcement agency. My friend and his wife were afraid and embarrassed, and paid the criminals thousands of dollars only to realize later it was a scam. While these victims are my friends, I know this happens every day to older adults across Wisconsin, and I am making this a top priority.

Elder abuse doesn't just impact seniors, it impacts our economy and all taxpayers. Financial abuse has been reported to cost older Americans more than \$2.6 billion annually. That figure gets worse because 1 in 10 financial abuse victims turns to Medicaid as a direct result of their savings being stolen. The cost to Medicaid for financial

abuse alone costs more than \$2.6 billion annually.

It's clear that Wisconsin and our nation has a lot of work to do in this area. We cannot afford to be unprepared for the Silver Tsunami to hit us head on. I'm encouraged by the partnerships we are forming and welcome your ideas as we start to tackle this important issue.

*Attorney General Brad Schimel was elected as Wisconsin attorney general in 2014. He began his career as a frontline prosecutor in the Waukesha County DA's Office in 1989. After serving 17 years as an assistant district attorney, he was elected Waukesha County District Attorney in 2006 and was reelected twice.*

*In his career as a frontline prosecutor, Schimel tried more than 150 jury trials in every type of case a prosecutor handles, from traffic cases to sexual assaults to numerous homicides. His distinguished career includes recognition from the Wisconsin Association of Victim and Witness Professionals as "Wisconsin Professional of the Year" for his work on behalf of survivors of sexual assault.*



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