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Testimony for the Elder Justice Coordinating Council
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Esteemed Members of the Elder Justice Coordinating Council, thank you for giving the National Center on Elder Abuse the opportunity to address the council about World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which will take place this June 15th. I am Dr. Laura Mosqueda, a geriatrician, professor of Family Medicine and Geriatrics at the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California, and the Director of the National Center on Elder Abuse.

The National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) is one of nine elder justice resource centers funded by the Administration for Community Living. We provide policymakers, professionals, and the public the latest information and resources on research, training, policy, and best practices on intervention in elder mistreatment. The NCEA hosts a comprehensive data and publications repository, synthesizes and disseminates evidence-based practices, and leads our nation's World Elder Abuse Awareness Day campaign.

As the EJCC has recognized, elder abuse is a widespread social, public health, economic, and justice concern that impacts an estimated 1 in 10 older adults each year. For the 6 million people in the United States with dementia, 1 in 2 will be abused or neglected. Only 1 in 24 cases of abuse in the community is ever reported to authorities and we have almost no idea about what is happening in licensed facilities such as nursing homes. The CDC recognizes five major types of elder abuse: Physical, psychological or emotional, sexual, and financial abuse along with neglect. And polyvictimization (experiencing multiple types of abuse) is very common. The consequences can be severe and life-altering (not to mention life ending). Advanced age itself creates vulnerabilities.... That's why we have a special category called *Elder Abuse*. But there are often even more vulnerabilities that accompany advanced age. Multiple chronic conditions that impact physical function, dementia, mental health problems that are often unrecognized and untreated, limited social supports, perilous economic reserves, and a lifetime of accumulated traumas are just some of the vulnerabilities. These are the people who are most severely impacted and these are the people with the least physiologic, emotional, social, and economic reserves to support resiliency and recovery.

Like other forms of interpersonal violence, elder abuse often occurs in private, hidden from public view. It is frequently outside of the public's consciousness and discourse. The stark reality is that many older people live with abuse and never get the help or resources they need to prevent or mitigate harms. As the cohort of aging Americans steadily increases approaching 20% of the total population, the amount of abuse is predicted to rise. But this is not a future etched in stone. We have the opportunity NOW to alter the trajectory.

Our goal at the NCEA is to improve the national response to elder abuse and help ensure that all older adults enjoy the liberties and freedoms we all deserve – including aging with dignity and respect, free of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The EJCC's belief in elder rights and justice memorialized in the eight recommendations for increased federal involvement to address elder maltreatment, are critical to driving and supporting this objective.

The NCEA's World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) campaign is one example of how we support the EJCC's recommendation to develop a broad-based public awareness campaign.

WEAAD is an international initiative, launched by our Canadian colleagues in 2006 to unite communities around the world in raising awareness about elder abuse. This is a day in which we take the phenomenon of elder abuse out of the shadows and into the light of public attention. By collectively recognizing the imperative of elder justice, we will convert awareness to action.

Under the guidance of, and in partnership with, the Administration for Community Living, the NCEA leads the effort to engage individuals, communities, agencies, and organizations, internationally and nationwide, in an expanded Week of WEAAD activities. The week will kick off on Friday with a national weekend of prayer and action, followed by a focus on Interdisciplinary Partnerships on Monday, Intergenerational Collaboration on Tuesday, Intervention and Prevention on Wednesday, Intersectionality on Thursday, and International Elder Justice efforts on Friday.

- **Interdisciplinary action** is essential to address the multifactorial complexities of elder abuse that traverse social, medical, legal, public health, financial, and law enforcement domains. Investing in cross-agency collaboration is key to an interdisciplinary response. Interdisciplinary action is a fundamental aspect of the EJCC's activities, fostering collaboration between different agencies and organizations that might not otherwise work together in a coordinated, comprehensive, whole-system response to abuse intervention. The EJCC's recommendations to enhance investigative and prosecutorial efforts, expand services for victims, and augment adult protective services can only occur through such collaborations.
- Preserving elder rights and safety is foundational to a free and fair society. Each of us, at every age, has a role to play to ensure that elder liberties are protected. Engaging people across the lifespan is central to this goal. This begins with challenging ageism, and with it, the stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination that degrade older adults and erode inclusive, diverse, and equitable communities. The NCEA has launched an awareness initiative directed at college students. Our recent publication "Elder Abuse Prevention: What College Students Should Know" and outreach efforts promote **intergenerational engagement**. Volunteer opportunities, mentorship programs, and public education campaigns are other ways to join this initiative. Together, people of all ages can help build strong, connected, and supportive communities.
- Freedom from maltreatment is an absolute right and our collective responsibility. **Abuse Intervention and Prevention** necessitate concerted engagement by multidisciplinary providers, professionals, and the public to recognize, report, and respond to abuse when we see it or suspect that it is occurring. Understanding the signs and risk factors associated with abuse are key to prevention and early detection. Appropriate resources are vital to effective intervention. The EJCC's recommendations to augment investigation and prosecution and adult protective services are actionable steps to increase prevention and remediation efforts. The EJCC's support of a federal elder justice research agenda is necessary to identify and validate best practice interventions and better outcomes for older people.
- **Recognizing the intersectionality of elder abuse** is core to understanding the impact of abuse and resulting traumas. Older adults of all abilities, ages, education levels, ethnicities, gender identities and sexual orientations, religious affiliations and spiritual beliefs, incomes, and other identities experience abuse, neglect, and exploitation. However, elder abuse does not happen uniformly across these domains; our histories and the identities we carry influence abuse

experiences and help-seeking behaviors. For older adults from marginalized communities, the multiple, compounding forms of oppression and discrimination experienced across the lifespan manifest differently. Responses must be person-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate. The EJCC's recognition of the need for enhanced victim services speaks to this need.

The NCEA will explore this issue more fully in our WEAAD Webinar on June 15th, "Trauma informed Practices to Address Abuse and Build Resilience." With a panel of experts, we will explore the cumulative and complex trauma histories of diverse older adults, how trauma relates to elder abuse, and strategies to provide culturally responsive and trauma-informed support.

- We will round out our week with **International Elder Justice Efforts**, sharing best practices and coordinated efforts across borders to strengthen prevention work towards global elder justice. Tapping into a broader range of perspectives, ideas, and resources can lead to innovative ideas and multifaceted solutions to the complex issue of elder abuse.

EJCC members have already spearheaded meaningful abuse prevention measures. The Department of Justice has funded the Elder Abuse Guide for Law Enforcement and educational initiatives for judges to assess abuse in guardianship cases, and leads efforts to improve capacity assessment, thus advancing a core EJCC recommendation. The CFPB regularly works with the NCEA on initiatives to combat financial fraud and scams. The Social Security Administration's scams prevention group has collaborated with the NCEA on an anti-scams training. And the NCEA has worked with the US Postal Service to use reframed, anti-ageist messaging in its materials.

These collaborations are just the beginning of what this council and its members can achieve and inspire to advance elder justice. With the eight recommendations as the driver, the EJCC can lead the field further and faster. Actively engaging in, supporting, and disseminating information about World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is a start. Catalyzing a coordinated EJCC research agenda, innovative best practice interventions, augmented multidisciplinary detection and response systems, and actionable elder policy measures accompanied by appropriate funding are next. We must also help older adults and their families who have been traumatized by abuse to heal. The EJCC can better the lives of millions of older people and their loved ones who have been impacted by abuse and finally put an end to elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Respectfully submitted,
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