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Alameda County District Attorney's Office
Testimony for AoA OAA Reauthorization
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Good Afternoon.

My name is Laurinda Ochoa. I'm a lawyer in the Alameda County District Attorney's Office in Oakland, CA, assigned to prosecute Elder Abuse cases.

Alameda County has a dedicated Elder Abuse Court handling all felony cases and most civil matters involving seniors and dependant adults. Because elder abuse cases are assigned to one court, we handle criminal matters quickly and efficiently, minimizing the inconvenience and stress to elders, and reducing local government costs.

Two lawyers prosecute all felony elder abuse cases from charging to disposition. We are assisted by two Victim Witness Advocates who work directly with our victims. APS, banks, hospitals and families refer cases to local police agencies. The police investigate and submit cases to the DA for charging.

Our team prosecutes thefts and assaults in nursing homes; street robberies of elders; physical abuse by family, strangers and caretakers; and thefts by family members, con artists, caretakers and licensed professionals. We see it all.

As a society, I believe we are just beginning to recognize and respond to the problem of elder abuse. Today, we are where we were 30 years ago with domestic violence.

I would like to share three concerns:

FIRST: 3/4ths of our victims suffer from cognitive impairment. I believe dementia and undiagnosed cognitive decline is the most significant risk factor and predictor for elder abuse. As a direct result of their impairment, these elders are unable to protect themselves from physical abuse and are unable to recognize financial abuse.

SECOND: We believe that most elder abuse - like child abuse and domestic violence of the past - goes unreported and uninvestigated. It remains behind closed doors. Resources for uncovering abuse- both in social services and in law enforcement - are stretched to the breaking point.

THIRD: We do not know the true costs of elder abuse, not only to individual victims, but also to society. Daily, in law enforcement, we see elders losing their homes, savings and independence; their health, peace of mind and will to live.

Many of our victims never fully recover from elder abuse. Their shame, embarrassment and despair are palpable and frequently lead to illness, debility, and an earlier death.

As a society we all bear the costs of elder abuse. We have increased costs of medical care for injury, both physical and psychological. We have increased costs to house and provide for elders who've lost their homes and savings. And, we have increased costs of caring for debilitated victims who lack the ability to care for themselves.

We must address the need for early diagnosis, intervention and programs to assist those elders most at risk for abuse, particularly those with cognitive impairments. We, in law enforcement, know that by the time we see senior victims in our Elder Abuse Court the damage has been done. No amount of jail time can make up for the injuries and losses our elders suffer.

Thank –you.