

March 30, 2010

Dear Administration on Aging,

Thanks for allowing me speak her today, I don't wish to repeat any of what you have already heard. I want to tell you of a experience I had with the Legal Hotline for Texans. There was a ninety -two year old, she lived in Wharton, Texas . She had a number health problems. Her daughters lived out of state. I suggested to them some one needed her medical power of attorney. When suggestions are made unless you are professional, everyone second guesses you.

I told one of the daughters to call the Legal Hotline for Texans and get their idea on it. The hotline told them this was the right thing to do.

Hotlines can make a difference in our elderly neighbors' lives and give them access to legal help regardless of age and income. That is, age and income are no longer barrier to access to legal help, with senior legal hotlines.

Hotlines are popular. Hotlines get results. Hotlines catch and resolve legal problems early. Hotlines provide an avenue where seniors can report physical, emotional and financial abuse and learn what steps to take to protect themselves or others. Hotlines save public resources by helping clients prevent legal problems before they occur and ensuring that elders can remain as independent as possible.

I also submit as testimony the two-page fact sheet prepared by the National Association of Senior Legal Hotlines.

Very truly yours,

Mary Lovings

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NASLH

**National Association
of
Senior Legal Hotlines**

Statewide Senior Legal Hotlines: Justice is Only a Phone Call Away for Senior Citizens

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SENIOR LEGAL HOTLINES: A PROVEN ‘PROGRAM INNOVATION’

- Statewide senior legal hotlines (known by different names, including legal helplines, advice lines and law lines) provide free legal information, advice, referrals and a variety of additional services to Americans over 60. Seniors can call toll-free and talk to specially trained advocates about any legal issue. Most callers receive the advice and information they need during a single phone call, but extra help is often available when needed.
- The first hotlines were established in the late 1980s. From 1991 to 2006, short-term Administration on Aging “program innovation” grants supported about a dozen hotlines every year. Over the years, hotlines in 27 states, plus D.C. and Puerto Rico, received these grants. (Hotlines in three other states have existed without AoA funding.)
- AoA “Model Approaches to Statewide Legal Systems” innovation grants to states have enabled the creation of two new hotlines since 2006. Up to four more may be established as a result of the latest round of grants. But Model Approaches funding, meant mainly to promote state involvement in and statewide coordination of senior legal services (not direct service) is only temporary.
- In recent years, seven hotlines have had to shut down. Others are experiencing severe instability as states slash funding, foundations cut back and the first rounds of Model Approaches grants end.

Senior legal hotlines provide advice and help with legal matters to seniors with no place else to turn, saving public and private resources!

For example:

- A senior who gets solid advice and help with a power of attorney and advance health care directive today will be far less likely to require a guardianship/conservatorship in the future, thereby avoiding court costs, court-appointed attorneys.
- A grandparent is assisted to establish a stable household with neglected grandchildren, keeping them out of the foster care system and making it much more likely that the children will avoid encounters with the criminal justice system in the future.
- Helping to preserve the homes and other modest assets of low-income seniors enables them to remain independent for as long as possible, minimizing the need for publicly funded assistance and making it more likely that those assets will be passed to the next generation.
- When an abuser strikes, causing an elder physical, psychological or financial harm, the senior is quickly linked to services and resources to ensure her/his safety and end the abuse or exploitation.

SENIOR LEGAL HOTLINES GET RESULTS!

- Hotlines provide legal information, advice and other services in about 100,000 cases/year;
- The average cost of hotline services is only \$97 per case;
- 87% of seniors found the services helpful and said they would recommend it to others.

Please turn the page

TEN REASONS TO SUPPORT STATEWIDE SENIOR LEGAL HOTLINES

1. As the senior population undergoes unprecedented growth, hotlines are a proven, effective and economical way to provide valuable services to those in need, coordinating with local senior legal services programs where they exist to make their work more efficient and vastly expand the number of seniors who can get help.
2. Hotlines are popular: Clients want the ease of advice and assistance by phone and are satisfied with the services and assistance hotlines provide. In each of six recent surveys in six states, seniors told interviewers that a free legal hotline is the most desired legal service.
3. Hotlines get results; outcome studies show that many legal problems can be successfully handled with help from hotlines; 84 percent of clients say they would call the hotline again.
4. Hotlines catch and resolve legal problems early, avoiding the need for more costly intervention later via lawsuits and courts. Some offer mediation services to promote early dispute resolution.
5. Hotlines provide an additional avenue where seniors can report physical, emotional and financial abuse and learn what steps to take to protect themselves or others.
6. Hotlines provide efficient means of screening callers to ensure they receive the benefits and services they need, as access to many programs involving prescription drugs, health insurance, pensions and home health care programs grow more complex.
7. Senior legal hotline advocates view the client holistically. They can understand the full range of issues from the facts the senior tells them and know the full spectrum of solutions available.
8. Hotlines can help in times of disaster or crisis by providing a point of entry for people with legal issues or questions. At this time, many are devoting extra efforts to helping thousands of seniors avoid foreclosure and find ways to remain in their homes – a critical factor in preventing unnecessary institutionalization.
9. Hotlines make a difference in the lives of our elderly neighbors. They give every senior access to justice, regardless of advanced age or income.
10. Hotlines save public resources by helping clients prevent legal problems before they occur and ensuring that elders can remain as independent as possible.

The National Association of Senior Legal Hotlines (NASLH) unites advocates from statewide senior legal hotlines, facilitating the sharing of relevant information to strengthen the role of statewide hotlines in protecting the legal rights of seniors and increasing legal resources available to older Americans.

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