



SUMMER STEPHAN  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

June 7, 2023

*Via Messenger*

Presiding Judge Michael T. Smyth  
San Diego County Superior Court  
1100 Union St  
San Diego, California 92101

**Re: Response to 2021/2022 Grand Jury Report: “Reducing Elder Abuse: Public Awareness & The Role of Community Based Senior Centers”**

Dear Judge Smyth:

The 2021/2022 San Diego County Grand Jury investigated issues related to the reduction of elder abuse, including public awareness and the role of community based senior centers, and wrote a report detailing the facts developed in the investigation and making a series of 9 findings and 14 recommendations to various governmental entities, including the District Attorney. As required by Penal Code § 933, I write to respond to the Grand Jury's Findings 01, 02, 03, 04, 1 & 3, and Recommendations 22-7, 22-8 & 22-14, which involve matters under the control of the District Attorney.

**FINDINGS:**

**Finding 01:** With the focus of presentations by AIS and the San Diego County District Attorney’s Elder Abuse Unit on elder scams and financial abuse, other types of elder abuse have received less attention.

**Response:** The District Attorney prioritizes the protection of elders and dependent adults and appreciates the Grand Jury’s attention to this important issue. Recently, the District Attorney developed and launched the innovative Elder Justice Task Force bringing together local, state, and federal partner agencies to combat large-scale financial elder scams preying on our elder citizens. While this implementation brought added but necessary attention to elder scams and financial elder abuse, the District Attorney’s Elder Abuse Unit continued to concurrently concentrate on *all* types of elder abuse in its community outreach prevention efforts and prosecution, including physical, neglect, sexual, and financial elder abuse. Accordingly, the District Attorney disagrees that attention was not focused on other forms of elder abuse, recognizing that the launch of the new Elder Justice Task force brought more attention specifically to financial abuse. Our office remains committed to focusing its attention on the prevention and prosecution of all types crimes affecting our senior citizens.

**Finding 02:** Presentations to small select groups do not achieve the expanding of public awareness of the signs of elder abuse and how to report suspected elder abuse to the extent as outlined in the "Aging Roadmap."

**Response:** The District Attorney agrees with this finding. Accordingly, the District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit continually performs community outreach by providing presentations about the signs of elder abuse and how to prevent and report suspected elder abuse at various locations throughout the County to public groups of all sizes, including continuing online presentations to reach a greater audience.

**Finding 03:** Forms of media such as billboard signage, social media, and TV and radio public service announcements would provide opportunities for expanding public awareness of signs of elder abuse and how to report suspected elder abuse.

**Response:** The District Attorney agrees with this finding and includes robust information about signs of elder abuse and how to report suspected elder abuse on its public website and social media platforms. The District Attorney will also discuss with Adult Protective Services and Health and Human Services Agency collaborating on a large-scale educational media campaign to expand public awareness of elder abuse prevention and reporting.

**Finding 04:** Multiple phone numbers for reporting suspected elder abuse could cause confusion and frustration for the public and subsequently cause failure to report.

**Response:** The District Attorney agrees with this finding. Accordingly, the District Attorney's Office public website emphasizes that the best phone number to report suspected elder abuse is the Adult Protective Services 24/7 hotline while also providing and explaining alternative reporting possibilities depending on what type of abuse is occurring and where the abuse is occurring such as in a facility licensed by the State of California.

**Finding 1:** The EPC engages an extensive list of stakeholders in routine collaboration to address the issue of elder abuse in San Diego County; however, the County's commitment to coordinating a response to elder abuse has not extended to include CBSC managements' attendance at scheduled meetings of both EPC and AIS.

**Response:** The District Attorney agrees with this finding insofar as it relates to CBSC managements' direct attendance at EPC meetings. However, the District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit and EPC are engaged directly and indirectly with CBSCs. The EPC highlighted a significant community partner – The San Diego Seniors Community Foundation (SDSCF) – at a prior EPC meeting and invited them to present to the entire EPC group. One of SDSCF's core focus areas is connecting and revitalizing all CBSCs in San Diego County (<https://sdscf.org/about/focus-areas/>). Additionally, the District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit has cultivated a relationship with the Senior Center Association, which includes the directors of all CBSCs in San Diego County, and provided them with a presentation on the prevention and reporting of elder abuse.

**Finding 3:** Since CBSCs are regularly used by seniors, there exists an opportunity for educating their clientele and the local community about the types of elder abuse and how to report suspected elder abuse.

**Response:** The District Attorney agrees with this finding. Accordingly, the District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit continually performs community outreach by providing presentations about the signs of elder abuse and how to prevent and report suspected elder abuse at various locations throughout the County to public groups of all sizes, including presentations to local CBSCs.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Recommendation 22-7:** Focus presentations on all areas of elder abuse, not just the recent focus on elder scams and financial abuse.

**Response:** This recommendation need not be implemented because the District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit already provides presentations focused on all areas of elder abuse. The District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit has recently been emphasizing its launch of the first Elder Justice Task Force in the country in partnership with several local, state, and federal agencies, to combat large-scale elder scams preying on our elder citizens. However, the District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit has continued its community outreach prevention efforts and prosecution for all types of elder abuse, including physical, neglect, sexual, and financial abuse. The Unit does advise the audience that elders are most likely to fall victim to financial abuse, more so than the other types of elder abuse, but our office continues to give all forms of elder abuse great attention in our training, outreach, and prosecutions.

**Recommendation 22-8:** Provide information regarding signs of elder abuse and how to report suspected elder abuse on a wider scale to the public rather than to a limited audience.

**Response:** This recommendation has been implemented in part. The District Attorney currently provides information regarding signs of elder abuse and how to report suspected elder abuse on a wide scale to the public through its public website and through its opening and operation of One Safe Place, the North County Family Justice Center. The District Attorney commits to continued partnerships with Adult Protective Services and Health and Human Services Agency and to discussing a large-scale collaborative educational campaign in addition to the prevention work underway in order to expand public awareness of elder abuse prevention and reporting.

The District Attorney's Office public website provides information about elder abuse, including warning signs of various types of abuse, the importance of reporting elder abuse, and detailed explanations about how to report suspected abuse (<https://www.sdceda.org/helping/elder-abuse>).

Additionally, on July 5, 2022, One Safe Place, the North County Family Justice Center - a project of the District Attorney, opened its doors. This is a one-stop-shop for victims and survivors of abuse and trauma, including elder abuse and dependent adult abuse victims. One Safe Place has a robust team of elder abuse prevention partnership with Community Based

Organizations, and enjoys formal MOU partnerships with the following elder abuse/prevention organizations:

- Aging and Independent Services/Adult Protective Services
- Alzheimer’s Association San Diego, Imperial Chapter
- Alzheimer’s San Diego
- Elder Law and Advocacy
- Meals on Wheels
- PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly)
- Serving Seniors

One Safe Place has a social media presence on both Facebook and Instagram encouraging victims of all ages to seek services and support.

In August 2022, One Safe Place hosted an Elder Abuse Awareness community event where seniors were invited from throughout the community to attend and learn from various Community Based Organizations and hear experts discuss elder abuse generally and how to prevent it. There were resource tables and information provided from community stakeholders that serve seniors, including AIS/APS, Alzheimer’s San Diego, Elder Law and Advocacy, Meals on Wheels, and Serving Seniors.

In September 2022, the first “in-person” EPC meeting since the COVID pandemic was held to showcase the opening of One Safe Place. Eight One Safe Place MOU partners provided a panel presentation on services offered specifically to seniors and detailed all the resources that could be provided out of One Safe Place as well as the greater community. MOU partners that presented to the EPC were:

- District Attorney’s Office
- Palomar Health
- Adult Protective Services
- Elder Law & Advocacy
- San Diego PACE
- Serving Seniors
- Alzheimer’s San Diego
- Meals On Wheels

In June 2023, One Safe Place is partnering with Meals on Wheels to distribute information about available resources and prevention inside Meals on Wheels meal boxes in order to reach those that may not traditionally receive information via TV, news, or social media.

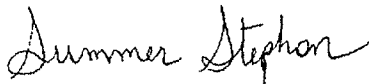
In August 2023, One Safe Place will host another senior wellness and prevention awareness community event in order to provide awareness about all aspects of Elder Abuse.

Since opening on July 5, 2022, One Safe Place has served a large number of elders: 121 clients over 60 years old and 74 clients over 65 years old. In terms of total community members served by One Safe Place, 9% of all clients are over 60 years old and 6% of all clients are over 65 years old. We expect those numbers to grow as more people learn about the new center.

**Recommendation 22 14:** Include representation from CBSCs on the Elder Protection Council to keep them current on issues of elder care and elder abuse.

**Response:** The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future. The District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit will invite direct representation from the CBSCs to the Elder Protection Council meetings by the end of calendar year 2023. In the meantime, the District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit will continue to engage directly and indirectly with CBSCs through the EPC's partnership with The San Diego Seniors Community Foundation (SDSCF). One of SDSCF's core focus areas is connecting and revitalizing all CBSCs in San Diego County (<https://sdscf.org/about/focus-areas/>). The District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit will also continue its relationship with the Senior Center Association, which includes the directors of all CBSCs in San Diego County, in order to keep them current on issues of elder care and elder abuse.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Summer Stephan".

SUMMER STEPHAN  
San Diego County District Attorney