Oral Testimony of Robert B. Blancato, National Coordinator, Elder Justice Coalition  
House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,  
Education and Related Agencies  
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Chair De Lauro, Ranking Member Cole:

Thank you for this hearing and inviting me to testify. Your focus on healthy aging is timely in the middle of Older Americans Month and the start of the decade of healthy aging as declared by the WHO.

Healthy aging is for more than one generation. It supports the wellbeing of the American society overall. Healthy aging remains elusive for many older adults. Especially the one in ten over the age of 60 who are victims of elder abuse. The triple evils of abuse, neglect and financial exploitation pose a direct threat to healthy aging.

Healthy aging includes physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. But a 2018 NIJ report said elder abuse victims reported considerably higher rate of first year depression, general anxiety disorder and poor self-reported health compared to non-victims.

Financial security is necessary for healthy aging. The FBI reports that people over 60 make up the majority of cyber-crime victims with average victims losing $10,000. Romance scams praying on isolated and lonely older adults had its victims lose $139 million according to the FTC.

The pandemic led to more older adults being isolated. Another FBI report stated that elder fraud jumped by 30% in 2020 and older adults lost more than $100 million to covid-19 related fraud alone.

I come as the National Coordinator of the Elder Justice Coalition and a repeat witness to this Subcommittee which was the first to include dedicated money for elder justice. Prevention is key to healthy aging. Elder justice at its core through its services and interventions works to reduce and ultimately prevent elder abuse and mistreatment.

So today I urge this Subcommittee to make continued investments in elder justice.

First, maintain the emergency funding provided to the Elder Justice Act in the last two pandemic bills. Specifically, we call for a $188 million funding for the Elder Justice/ Adult Protective Services for continued APS formula grants. The President’s FY 23 budget level of $58 million is insufficient to meet current and future APS Needs.

We support the President’s FY 23 request of $36.8 million for the long-term care ombudsman program in the OAA and ask for an additional appropriation of $52 million under the Elder Justice Act to allow them to expand their work in assisted living facilities.
How were these emergency funds used by APS and ombudsmen? In Connecticut, funds were used by the ombudsman program to pay overtime to extend work hours and cover weekends, enhance virtual work, and purchase a zoom account to support a statewide family council. In Oklahoma, they were used to hire an intake specialist for both APS and ombudsman and hold a safe reentry ombudsman volunteer conference later in May. Other uses included supporting tribal APS programs and providing emergency housing and shelter for victims with in-home services. In rural areas, for purchasing or replacing vehicles for APS visits and recruiting volunteers to make up severe shortages.

What critical service or program ends if the funding not maintained? As the pandemic eases its grip, people in the field expect an increase in reported elder abuse. Staff capacity to respond is critical. With ombudsmen, as they regain access their workload of investigating quality of life issues will also increase.

We also recommend:

- Increased funding for Title VII of the Older Americans Act a for public awareness programs, multidisciplinary elder abuse teams and elder abuse hotlines
- Additional funding to ACL to expand elder abuse prevention training for all staff and volunteers in OAA programs. and improving education materials for older adult participants. This would be especially necessary in the National Family Caregiver Support program.
- Funding grants to area agencies on aging and other CBO’ to address social isolation as included in the House passed BBB.
- A Vital program in promoting healthy aging is the Social Services Block Grant. The primary source of funding for APS in some states but also funds home delivered meal, case management, and home care. Its funding has been frozen for years and it deserves an increase.
- Increased funding for nutrition and senior center programs in the OAA. They are part of elder justice as congregate sites provide socialization to reduce isolation which helps combat elder abuse.

On the equity front, we ask the Subcommittee to instruct ACL and its NARMS data collection system to do more to ascertain elder abuse prevalence in communities of color and LBGTQ communities. Coordinate all federally funded information and referral programs to help people find out where and how to report elder abuse. More funding for research and practice into self-neglect the most frequent category of elder abuse reported to APS. Finally, where it falls in your jurisdiction, support for the President’s recent nursing home reform proposals.

Federal health and social service programs must expand their focus on prevention. Programs that promote the independence and dignity of older adults contribute to healthy aging. Keep investing in elder justice. It can address the related consequences of abuse including isolation, falls, malnutrition, and mental health.
The most vulnerable older adults, including those with disabilities, are often the most susceptible to elder abuse. They deserve priority in how prevention services are accessed and provided. Healthy aging is a most admirable goal. Let us direct our resources to those who still lack it. A victim of elder abuse is never the same. If your support of elder justice prevents more victimization and promotes more healthy aging it is a most worthwhile investment.