



NEWS RELEASE –

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DENVER POLICE DEPARTMENT & DENVER DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE ANNOUNCE NEW ELDER ABUSE UNITS

In recognition of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, June 15, the Denver Police Department and Denver District Attorney's Office today announced the establishment of elder abuse units within their agencies to target crimes against Denver's at-risk seniors and adults.

Beth McCann has established a new Elder Abuse Unit in the Denver District Attorney's Office. "As a candidate and as the new district attorney, I pledged to prioritize the prosecution of elder abuse to address the increase in reported cases of such abuse as the population ages," McCann said. "It is important that we do what we can in law enforcement to ensure our seniors maintain their dignity and that they are safe in their everyday lives and communities."

The District Attorney's unit will focus on physical abuse and neglect crimes against at-risk adults, defined by Colorado law as adults aged 70 or older, and adults with intellectual/development disabilities (I/DD), and will expand to include prosecuting financial fraud cases against at-risk adults currently prosecuted in various other units of the office. The DA unit will work closely with DPD's newly-created Special Victims Unit (SVU) and others to develop cases and hold offenders accountable.

Additionally, elder abuse cases were not previously separately quantified in the DA's office reporting system, but they will be now. The DA's office will also continue its robust program of community meetings, outreach and educational efforts to expand Denver's awareness of the issues surrounding this population.

McCann appointed Michael Song to be the chief deputy of the new unit. Prior to joining the DA's office, Song was the state's chief legal expert on Colorado's marijuana laws and the marijuana industry in the Colorado Attorney General's Office. Michael was also an Assistant U.S. Attorney in both Washington, D.C. and Hawaii, and served in the U.S. Army.

The Denver Police Department's Special Victim's Unit was created to address allegations of abuse, neglect and exploitation involving Denver's at-risk community. In 2016, approximately 850 cases were investigated by detectives within Major Crimes and throughout the Districts. By creating the new unit, the elder abuse cases will be handled by specialized detectives and will ultimately provide more time for District and Major Crimes' detectives to investigate and solve other cases.

“There is zero tolerance for those who prey on our elderly community members, which is why the Denver Police Department is committing one sergeant and three detectives to our new Special Victim’s Unit,” said Chief White. “This new unit’s sole purpose is to investigate crimes against elderly residents and persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and bring those criminals to justice.”

The SVU will be part of the DPD’s Domestic Violence and Fraud Section within the Major Crimes Division and will conduct joint investigations with social workers and District Attorney investigators. If an at-risk adult is being hurt, threatened, frightened, or stolen from, please call the appropriate corresponding number:

- Call 911 for emergencies
- Call the Police Department non-emergency line at 720-913-2000.
- Call Adult Protective Services at 720-944-2994.
- Call the District Attorney’s Office fraud hotline at 720-913-9179.
- Call the Denver City Attorney’s Office at 720-913-8020.

Elder Abuse Information & Statistics

- Colorado enacted a mandatory reporting law for at-risk elders in 2014 and for adults with intellectual/development disabilities in 2016. The laws require that all mandatory reporters report the police within 24 hours of witnessing or suspicion of abuse, neglect or financial exploitation related to the at-risk adult population;
- Since the enactment of the mandatory reporting laws, in Denver the number of cases investigated by DPD related to all “at-risk” adults has increased by 271% (228 to 847 cases) between 2013 and 2016. Elder abuse cases increased by 418% (142 to 735 cases) in that same time frame. Based on these numbers Denver Police project 850-900 total cases in 2017, 762 for elder abuse, and 114 for other at-risk adults (Denver Police Department Analysis of At-Risk Elders and Intellectually/Developmentally Disabled Adults, March 2017);

(Note: Not every case reported is prosecutable as a crime for a variety of reasons, including insufficient evidence)

- In Denver, older adults (+70) comprised 11% of Denver’s population in 2015; by 2020, a projected 12%; and by 2030, a projected 14.3% (Id);
- National studies indicate that 1 in 10 older Americans experience some form of abuse in a given year while only 1 in 23 such cases are reported, with a significant proportion of older adults experiencing financial exploitation or financial fraud (U.S. Department of Justice, Elder Justice Initiative);
- Abused seniors are 3X more likely to die than non-abused seniors and abused seniors are more likely to be placed in nursing homes than non-abused seniors (Id);
- 70% of elder abuse and neglect is perpetrated by someone well known to the victim, usually family members, specifically grown children or spouses (Id);
- It is estimated that victims of financial abuse lose at least \$2.9 billion each year (American Journal of Public Health);