



Keeping Your Golden Years Golden: Ensure You Are Protected

By Bryan Garcia, NCWP Board Member

In the last few years, the world's spotlight has been focused on how, in the blink of an eye, the actions of a few unscrupulous people can completely obliterate someone's net worth. For someone who is retired, or about to retire, a sudden decrease in net worth can permanently affect their golden years. This is because individuals who are retired, or are about to retire, are not in a position to completely regenerate their retirement accounts that have taken them the better part of their grown lives to amass. If the last few years have taught us anything, it is that we need to protect ourselves so that our golden years remain golden.

While these financial atrocities have been very public in recent years, this is not something that is new to California. In fact, this has been an issue of public concern in this state for decades and is an issue that caused California's Legislature to act on over a decade ago. In the 1990s, California's Legislature recognized that unscrupulous individuals have routinely preyed on residents of this state who are over the age of 65. In response to these crimes, the Legislature enacted the Elder Abuse Dependent Adult Civil Protection Act. This act created financial incentives for lawyers, like myself, to advocate for the interests of our elderly population against those who attempt to prey on them.

While most people think of "elder abuse" as physical abuse (such as failing to give adequate care in nursing homes), it also includes the theft or embezzlement of a senior's property. This type of abuse can be perpetrated by anyone, from a family member to a person on the phone and can be as simple as taking money out of a bank account to turning over a piece of property. Most importantly, while these crimes are usually not often as public as those in the past few years, their consequences are just as grave, as they can forever alter the victim's golden years.

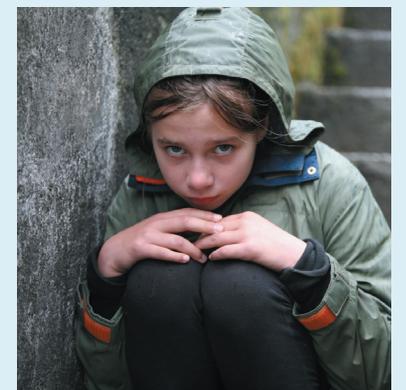
This is not supposed to be an article that is designed to strike fear into the readers. Rather, this is intended to be an informative piece that can prevent these injuries from occurring in the first place. Like the old adage states, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." By understanding that people may look to target California's older population, and knowing what to look for, you can prevent yourself, or a loved one from being put into a situation that will alter his or her retirement. An overall piece of good advice is to always be wary of those who tout themselves as specialists offering insurance and financial advice to seniors. While they may be legitimate, they also may not have had any relevant training or experience in the area that they are claiming. It is important to know and understand that the person's fancy title may be nothing more than a marketing ploy to get your business.

Next, it is always good to know what to look for, which include:

- **Financial Advisors and Investment Scams:** Sometimes, this can include individuals who attempt to sell get rich quick schemes or, it may be more subtle as placing you or a loved one in higher risk stocks than you had requested. Call the California Department of Corporations at 1-866-ASK-CORP (1-866-2677).
- **Telemarketing Fraud:** It is hard to know a legitimate telemarketer from one who is not. For this reason, it is important to do your research and be sure you know with whom you are talking before you provide your personal information over the phone. To file a complaint, call the Attorney General's office at 1-800-952-5255.
- **Medicare Fraud:** Either a stranger or a provider can perpetrate Medicare fraud. Never give your Medicare number to a stranger, and always check that your charges are accurate. If you suspect Medicare fraud, contact Medicare. If you suspect Medi-Cal fraud, contact the Attorney General's office. For Medicare fraud call 1-800-633-4227. To Report Medi-Cal provider fraud, call the Bureau of Medi-Cal Fraud and Elder Abuse in the state Attorney General's Office at 1-800-722-0432.

Common sense is the best way to avoid these types of scams. Make sure you don't rush into an investment until you have had a chance to investigate. Never be too trusting, and don't invest more than you can afford. Hopefully, these simple tips can be helpful in preventing a fraud that could alter what is supposed to be your golden years.

Bryan Garcia is a plaintiff's attorney and the L.A. representative of the State Bar for the California Young Lawyers Association. He is also a member of the Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa, where he holds the Residential District 10 seat.



NCWP Helps With Survey of Homeless

The Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa teamed with the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority and People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) to conduct a one-night snapshot of homelessness in the Westchester/Playa del Rey area.

The group scoured the neighborhood on September 28 to identify and interview the homeless to help assess risk factors and create a clearer picture of this issue in the community.

The information gathered will assist the Neighborhood Council and homeless groups in their efforts to find solutions and begin the process of moving people off the streets and into housing.

The Neighborhood Council's Homelessness and Vehicular Living Committee Chairman Booker Pearson said the committee will share the results at an upcoming board meeting. Look for the results in an upcoming issue of the HomeTown News.

For more information, please contact Pearson at (310) 699-1231, or email him at bookerpearson@verizon.net.

