

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
September 24, 2003

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Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Crime, Corrections and Victims' Rights
Hearing on "Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation: Are We Doing Enough?"
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The subcommittee gathers today to consider a problem that has not received the attention it deserves - the abuse of our elderly. I think it is clear that we are not doing enough to combat crime against seniors, and I applaud Senators Graham and Biden for holding this hearing to examine what we are currently doing, and what we need to do to prevent and punish this deplorable behavior.

I, along with Senators Kennedy, Feingold, Daschle, and Bingaman, introduced S. 1286, the Seniors Safety Act, earlier this year. The Seniors Safety Act is a comprehensive bill that addresses many of the most prevalent crimes perpetrated against seniors, including health care fraud, nursing home abuse, telemarketing fraud, and bribery, graft and fraud in pension and employee benefit plans. A title from an earlier version of this bill that I introduced - in the 106th Congress - was enacted as part of Senator Bayh's AProtecting Seniors from Fraud Act of 2000," requiring that the Attorney General both conduct a study of crime against seniors and include in the National Crime Victimization Survey specific information about crimes that disproportionately affect seniors, and the characteristics of the seniors who are victimized. Unfortunately, I understand that the study has not yet been completed.

It is particularly important that we deal with these crimes because older Americans are the most rapidly growing population group in our society, making them an ever more attractive target for criminals. The Department of Health and Human Services has predicted that the number of older Americans will grow from 13 percent of the U.S. population in 2000 to 20 percent by 2030. In Vermont, seniors comprise about 12 percent of the population, a number that is expected to increase to 20 percent by 2025.

Crime against seniors has remained stubbornly resistant over the last decade. According to a 2000 Justice Department study, more than 90 percent of crimes committed against older Americans were property crimes, with theft the most common. As our nation addressed our violent crime problem, we did not take a comprehensive approach to deterring the crimes that so harm the elderly, like telemarketing fraud, health care fraud, and pension fraud. The Seniors Safety Act provides such a comprehensive approach, and I look forward to working with Senators Graham, Biden, and others to accomplish our goals in protecting seniors from crime.

We all deserve to age with dignity, free of the threat of abuse or fraud. No one can guarantee that this will happen, but the Seniors Safety Act can be a powerful new tool to help crack down on those who prey upon older Americans. This effort is about all of us and our families.

I would ask the Chairman to include a sectional analysis of the Seniors Safety Act in the record of this hearing.

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