



Department of Justice

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Acting U.S. Attorney Observes 16th Annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

LEXINGTON, Ky. — The Acting U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky, Carlton S. Shier, IV, joins the entire Department of Justice in observing the 16th Annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day and joins the international voices condemning elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

The Department of Justice is committed, through its department-wide Elder Justice Initiative (EJI), to preventing and prosecuting fraud on America's seniors.

"World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to protecting elderly Americans," said Acting U.S. Attorney Shier. "We simply must prioritize protecting the elderly from the many forms of abuse they face, including financial, physical, and sexual abuse, exploitation, and neglect. While law enforcement has a primary role in this effort, we need to remember that everyone has a role. Friends and family should actively intercede when they are concerned that elderly loved ones are at risk of abuse, exploitation, or neglect. Elderly populations are at much greater risk; so, we must all be vigilant in watching over elderly friends and family, become knowledgeable about the various and prominent forms of elder abuse, and learn how to report it to the appropriate authorities. Our elderly deserve that commitment and protection."

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges, particularly for the elderly. Not only are seniors among those most susceptible and affected by the disease, but they also acutely feel the effects of pandemic precautions. During the pandemic, seniors are more isolated from their families, friends, and loved ones, making them more vulnerable to bad actors who would exploit the public health emergency to prey on the elderly, particularly with fraud schemes. This year especially, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is an important reminder of the dangers.

In its role, and with cooperation from local, state, and federal partners, the U.S. Attorney's Office prioritizes combatting elder financial exploitation. Two recent examples of Eastern District of Kentucky elder fraud cases include:

- **U.S. vs. Fafunmi et al.**: In August 2020, Ismaila Fafunmi, pleaded guilty to money

laundering charges related to a romance fraud and grant fraud scheme. In his plea agreement, Fafunmi admitted that he worked in conjunction with others, who communicated through online chats, to perpetrate a scheme to defraud U.S. citizens through a romance scheme, which targeted women over the age of 50. Fafunmi and his co-conspirators would set up fake profiles on dating websites profiling American men, often military members. Fafunmi's co-conspirators would engage in conversations with victims through the dating website, making the victims believe they were in a romantic relationship with the fictitious profile. Fafunmi, who was located in the United States, would then help to move the funds from the victim to his coconspirators, located abroad. Read more: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edky/pr/nigerian-national-pleads-guilty-romance-fraud-and-grant-fraud-scheme>

- **U.S. v. Teegarden:** In October 2020, Rebecca Teegarden was sentenced to 36 months for theft by a bank employee and aggravated identity theft. Between 2013 and 2019, Teegarden was employed as a bank teller and admitted to repeatedly using customers' names and account numbers to make miscellaneous debit cash withdrawals from the customers' bank accounts, without the customers' consent. Teegarden held the cash in her teller drawer and later converted the money to her own use, by depositing it into her or her mother's bank accounts. Teegarden admitted that she selected the accounts of her victims because those customers were elderly and did not regularly monitor their accounts. In total, Teegarden admitted that she stole \$79,086.00 from victims who were customers at the Bank.. Read more: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edky/pr/bracken-county-woman-sentenced-36-months-theft-bank-employee-and-aggravated-identity>

Another example of the U.S. Attorney's Office's efforts includes participation in the Kentucky Elder Justice Task Force, a cooperative effort that brings together the law enforcement resources of federal, state, and local agencies involved in protecting the elderly. For more information on the Kentucky Elder Justice Task Force, including how to report abuses, please visit: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edky/elder-justice-task-force>.

More broadly, other Department of Justice elder fraud initiatives include:

- **National Elder Fraud Hotline:** Last year, the Department of Justice launched a National Elder Fraud Hotline: 833-FRAUD-11. Staffed by experienced case managers who provide personalized support to callers, the hotline serves to assist elders and caretakers who believe they have been a victim of fraud by reporting and providing appropriate services.
- **Transnational Elder Fraud Strike Force:** Established in June 2019 to combat foreign elder fraud schemes, the strike force is composed of the Department's Consumer Protection Branch and six U.S. Attorneys' Offices, along with FBI special agents, Postal Inspectors, and numerous other law enforcement personnel. Since its inception, prosecutors in strike force districts brought cases against more than 140 sweep defendants.
- **Annual Elder Justice Sweep:** In March of 2020, the Department announced the largest coordinated sweep of elder fraud cases in department history. The Department, together with every U.S. Attorney's office, charged more than 400 defendants, causing over \$1 billion in loss through fraud schemes that largely affected seniors.
- **Money Mule Initiative:** Since October 2018, the Department and its law enforcement partners began a concentrated effort across the country and around the world to disrupt, investigate, and prosecute "money mule" activity used to facilitate fraud schemes,

especially those victimizing senior citizens. In 2019, actions were taken to halt the conduct of more than 600 domestic money mules, exceeding a similar effort against approximately 400 money mules in the previous year.

- **Holding foreign-based perpetrators and those who flee the United States accountable:** Transnational criminal organizations are targeting our elder population in schemes including mass mailing fraud, grandparent scams, romance scams, lottery and sweepstakes scams, IRS and Social Security Administration imposter scams, and technical-support scams.

For more information on enforcement actions, training and resources, research, and victim services, please visit www.justice.gov/elderjustice.

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