



# Hiding in Plain Sight in Georgia: Benefits Trafficking of Vulnerable Adults

SEPTEMBER 22, 2017

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
**ElderJustice**  
INITIATIVE



**OVCTTAC**  
OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME Training and Technical Assistance Center



# TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

---

- ▶ If you are experiencing any technical issues with the audio for this session, please let us know in the feedback box.
- ▶ If you have technical difficulties during the webinar, contact Danielle McLean, who is providing technical support for this webinar. His email address is [dmclean@ovcttac.org](mailto:dmclean@ovcttac.org).
- ▶ Today's session will be recorded and made available on the training website.
- ▶ If you have questions, type them in the feedback box. We will address as many as possible throughout the webinar.

# ELDER JUSTICE INITIATIVE

---

The **mission** is to support and coordinate the Department of Justice's enforcement and programmatic efforts to combat elder abuse, neglect, and financial fraud and scams that target older adults.

The Initiative does so by—

- Promoting justice for older adults.
- Helping older victims and their families.
- Enhancing state and local efforts through training and resources.
- Supporting research to improve elder abuse policy and practice.



Home

SHARE

en Español

SAFE EXIT

Elder Justice Initiative  
Home

- ▶ Older Americans, Families, and Caregivers
- ▶ Financial Exploitation
- ▶ Prosecutors
- ▶ Law Enforcement
- ▶ Victim Specialists
- ▶ Multidisciplinary Teams
- ▶ Researchers
- ▶ EJI Outreach

About EJI

Contact Us

Search EJI

## ELDER JUSTICE INITIATIVE (EJI)

REPORT ABUSE OR FIND HELP

New on ElderJustice.gov

**EJI launches the MDT  
Toolkit and Guide for  
elder abuse case review  
MDTs**



1 2 3 4

**Elder abuse is a complex issue that intersects with many disciplines.**

Elder abuse can happen to anyone. It affects people of every ethnic background, gender, and financial status.

# PRESENTERS

---



**Heather Strickland**  
Assistant Special Agent in Charge  
Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
At-Risk Adult Investigations Unit

**Pat King**  
Forensic Nurse  
**DHS** Forensic Special Initiatives Unit



# Hiding in Plain Sight in Georgia: Benefits Trafficking of Vulnerable Adults

Heather Strickland, Assistant Special Agent in Charge  
Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
At-Risk Adult Investigations Unit

Pat King, Forensic Nurse  
DHS Forensic Special Initiatives Unit



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# How We Got Here

## November 2011

- Two metro area cases involving adults with disabilities locked in basements/homes
- Reports from law enforcement of homes with adult residents with behavioral health and/or intellectual/developmental disabilities – no visible care
- US v. Linda Weston (Philadelphia, PA)



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Recognized Types of Trafficking

- 1. Sex Trafficking**
- 2. Labor Trafficking**
- 3. Human Organ Trafficking**



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Emerging Type of Trafficking

## 4. Benefits Trafficking Recognized by law enforcement in GA in 2011

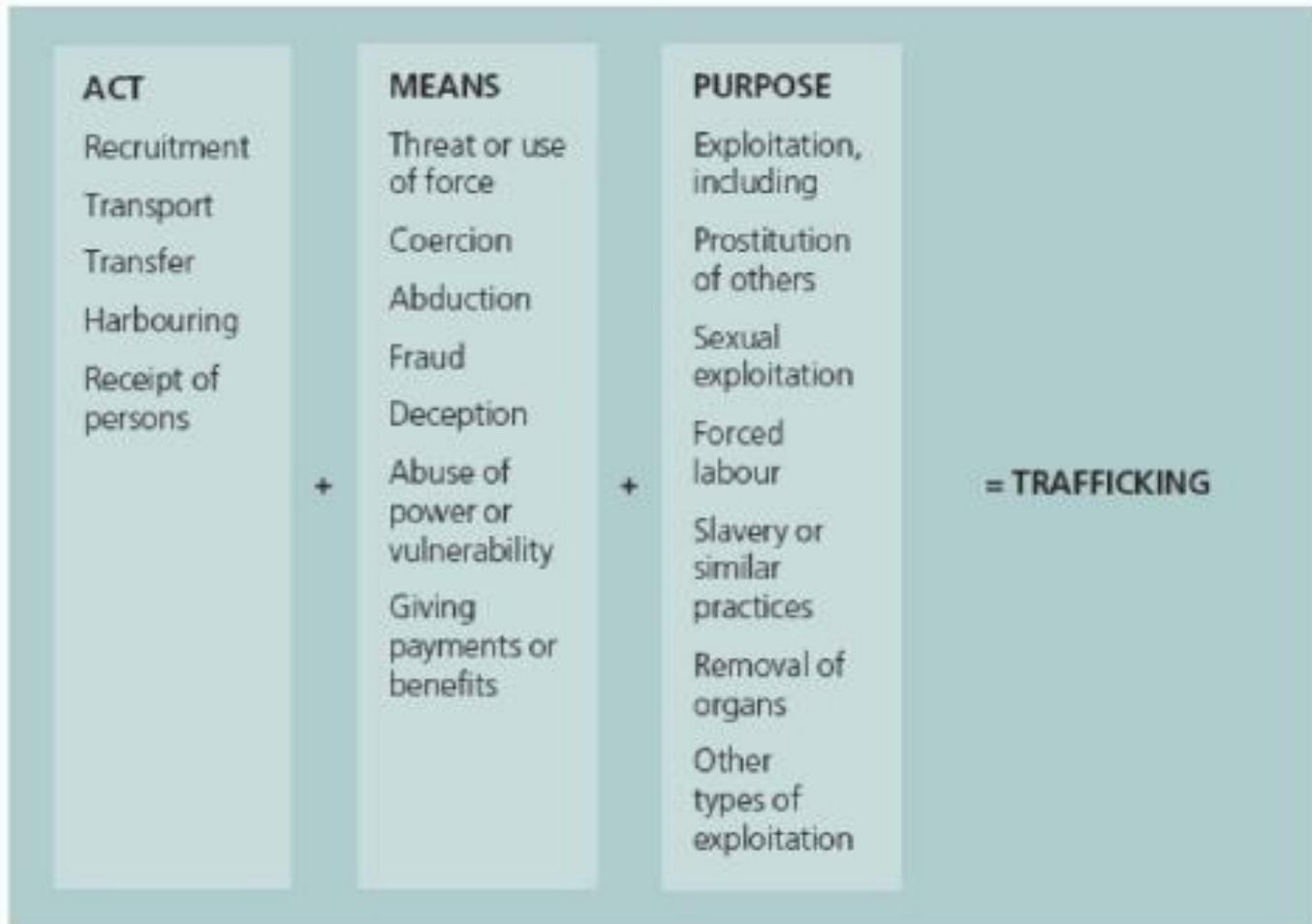


*Division of Aging Services  
Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Features of Trafficking



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Features of Benefits Trafficking

## The Act

### Recruitment

- Shelters
- Churches
- Hospitals
- Licensed Facilities
- On-line

## The Means

### Promises of

- Benefits
  - Services
  - Not delivered
- Coercion, Deception,  
False Representation  
Duress and other means*

## The Purpose

### Exploitation - Benefits Attached to At-Risk Adults

- Monthly income
- Food stamps,
- Social Security,
- Medicaid
- Veteran's Benefits
- Other fraud (Insurance, Tax, ID theft, etc.)



Division of Aging Services  
Georgia Department of Human Services



Georgia Bureau of Investigation

# Benefits Trafficking Racketeering Enterprises



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

---

# Elderly veteran held hostage for years in motel room as captor stole benefits, police say

---

By [Elahe Izadi](#) July 21 

The elderly Marine Corps veteran was held hostage in a cramped motel room about 50 miles north of New York City, according to authorities.

Video of the room, [shot by the Hudson Valley News Network](#), depicts the squalid conditions in which the 81-year-old was kept.

On Tuesday, police arrested a man who they said held the veteran hostage at the Highlands motel to steal his benefits checks, [the Associated Press reported](#).

The veteran, who police said has advanced dementia, told authorities that he thought he had been in the room for four days, [according to WABC-TV](#). He had been there for more than four years, police said.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# South Florida con artists turn ‘sober homes’ into insurance scam

BY FRED GRIMM

[fgrimm@miamiherald.com](mailto:fgrimm@miamiherald.com)

JANUARY 06, 2017 7:00 AM

“Over the past, bad actors have been using these laws to hide their exploitation of the very people that these laws were meant to protect,” a Palm Beach grand jury warned in a special report issued last month. “This is especially true in the business of recovery housing, where many unregulated homes have become unsafe and overcrowded ‘flophouses,’ where crimes like rape, theft, human trafficking, prostitution, and illegal drug use are commonplace.”

The grand jury described a kind of lowdown medical tourism designed to exploit the drug epidemic. Desperate parents, reacting to deceptive advertising, ship their addicted children to South Florida treatment programs. What their kids get, according to the grand jury, is rank exploitation.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

TULARE COUNTY

# Porterville man arrested for elder abuse and running an unlicensed home care facility



By Cory James

Tuesday, July 11, 2017

PORTERVILLE, Calif. (KFSN) -- A 911 medical aid call at a home Monday resulted in Porterville Police shutting down an unlicensed care facility.

Detectives said 66-year-old Juan Ledesma ran it and said he was arrested for not only operating without a license-- but also for allegedly abusing his elderly clients.

"We're looking at potential physical abuse, potential neglect, and potential financial abuse as well," said Lt. Dominic Barteau, Porterville Police Department.

Barteau said four elderly people ranging in age from 81 to 95 were not being properly cared for. They were taken to Sierra View Medical Center for evaluations and placed into new care facilities.



*Division of Aging Services  
Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Across the Country

Alabama

Arkansas

California

Colorado

Connecticut

District of Columbia

Florida

Georgia

Hawaii

Illinois

Indiana

Iowa

Kansas

Louisiana

Maryland

Michigan

Minnesota

Mississippi

Nevada

New York

North Carolina

Pennsylvania (US v Weston)

Tennessee

Texas

Virginia

Wisconsin



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Common Scenario

## Local law enforcement notified of possible unlicensed personal care home:

- Possible 60+ “911” calls to location in a year
- Residents – all required to turn over EBT cards upon move-in, yet lease agreement includes food
- Residents paying \$650-\$750/month in rent for ½ bedroom (*mattress*)
- Refrigerator is padlocked
- **EBT info reveals:**
  - Multiple EBT cards – *cards being used outside GA-trafficking cards*
  - Residents placed in several locations, though only one facility is licensed.
  - Several co-conspirators
  - Investigation spans multiple jurisdictions
- **SSA info reveals:**
  - Additional locations/co-conspirators identified



Division of Aging Services  
Georgia Department of Human Services



Georgia Bureau of Investigation

# Racketeering Enterprise



Hiding in plain sight in neighborhoods.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Trafficking/Racketeering Enterprise



Hiding in plain sight in neighborhoods.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# WARNING!!!!



## Module contains graphic photos

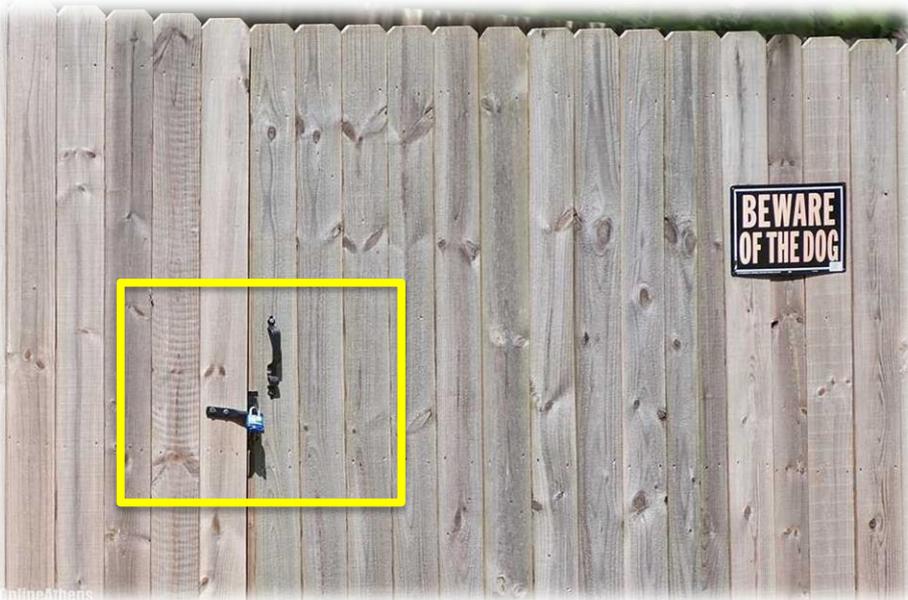


*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Racketeering Enterprise



Athens-Clarke County, GA



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Case Study: Athens

- Unlicensed home
- Residents:
  - Ages 52-71
  - Held against their will
  - Charged \$300-\$400/month
  - Required to sign over SSA and EBT
  - Clients of Department of Behavioral Health – no appts with DBH x 4 years while locked in basement
  - Drugged and locked in basement (crawlspcace)
  - Locked in backyard surrounded by 8” privacy fence (padlocked)
  - Given 5-Gallon buckets for toilets



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Case Study: Athens

- Unlicensed home
- Owner/Operator
  - Drove one resident to Atlanta to have sex with men
  - Owner/operator paid in drugs for sexual acts
  - Filmed sexual acts of residents living in the home

*Above illustrate residents frequently experience sexual servitude and/or labor servitude (recognized forms of trafficking) in addition to financial exploitation.*



Division of Aging Services  
Georgia Department of Human Services

Georgia Bureau of Investigation



# Case Study: Athens

- Owner/Operator and one co-conspirator arrested.
  - Nineteen charges including:
    - Exploitation and intimidation of disabled adults
    - Neglect to disabled adult
    - False imprisonment
    - Unlicensed Personal Care Home

Negotiated Plea – 40 years to serve 12



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Racketeering Enterprise



Athens-Clarke County, GA



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Racketeering Enterprise



Athens-Clarke County, GA



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Racketeering Enterprise



Athens-Clarke County, GA



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Racketeering Enterprise



Tift County, GA



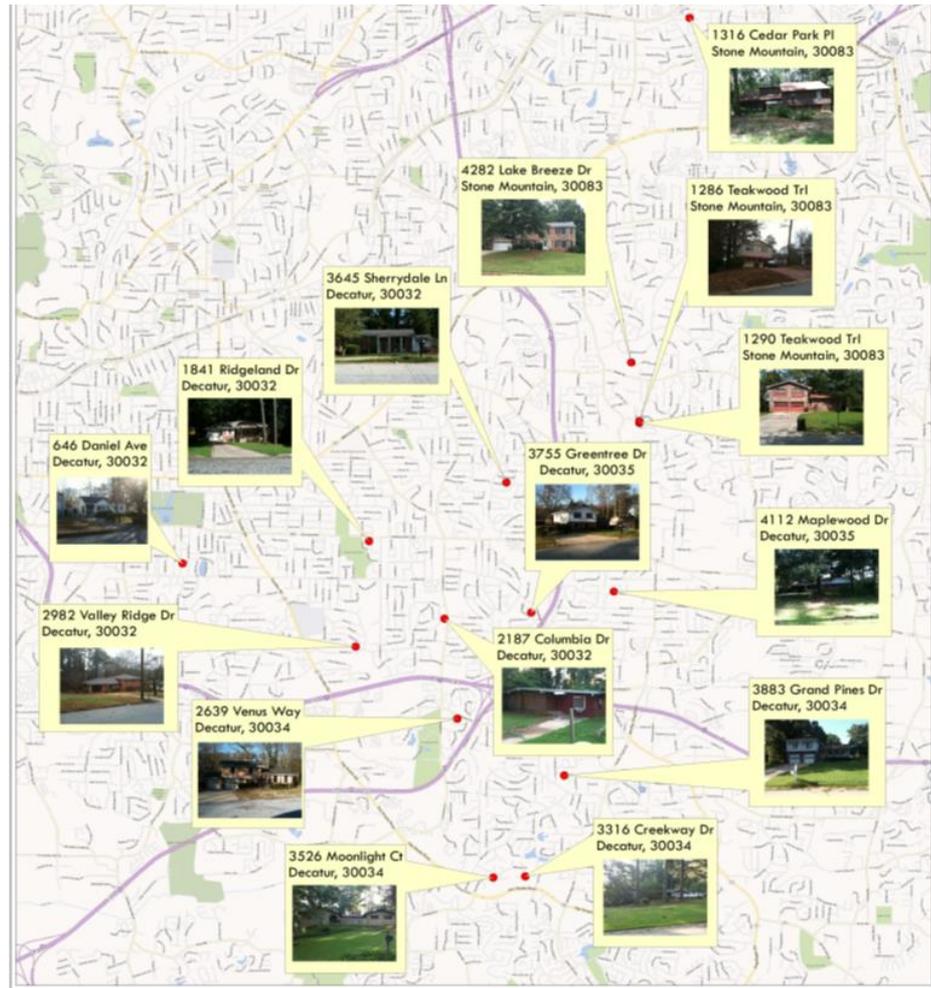
*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Racketeering Enterprise

Owner/Operator  
Moved residents  
15 Locations  
Three years  
To avoid detection



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*





Beaten & burned when caught getting food.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Living-Conditions



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Interiors



Health and safety issues

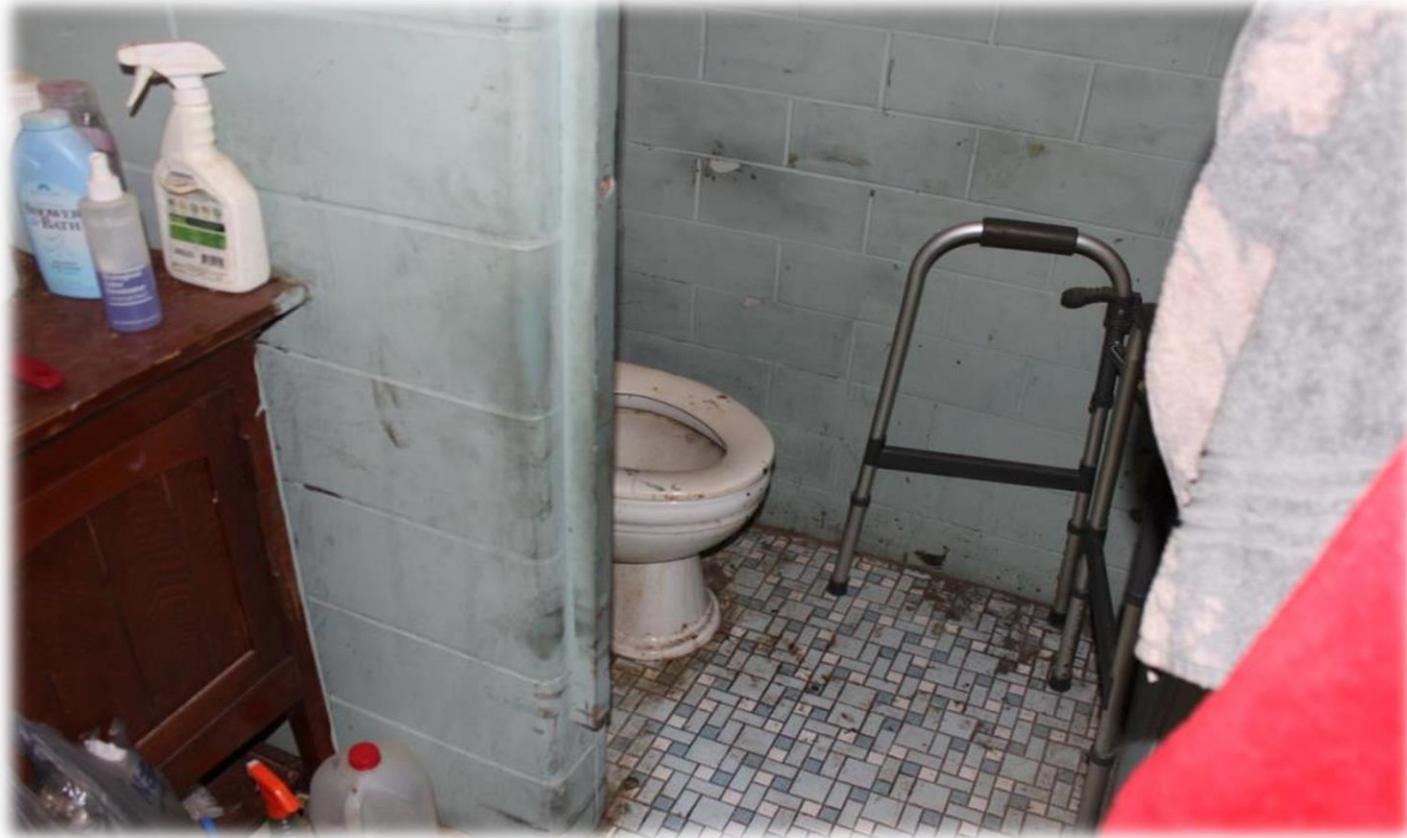


*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Interiors



Health and safety issues.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Interiors



Controlled access to food.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Interiors



Inappropriate food for diabetic residents.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Interiors



Plywood to separate “rooms”.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Interiors



Plywood to separate “rooms”.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Interiors



For he is the light of the world.  
John 8:12

No privacy.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Interiors



Unsanitary food storage.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Interiors



Bedrooms often mattresses on floor.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Interiors



Health and safety issues.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Neglect of Residents



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Neglect



Health and safety issues.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Neglect



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Neglect

## Medical Examiner's Report:

- 70 Black Male
- Multiple people in care home
- Evidence of financial exploitation
- Story did not match findings

## Cause of Death:

- Neglect, Heart Disease, Sepsis

## Manner of Death:

- Homicide



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Neglect



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# False Imprisonment

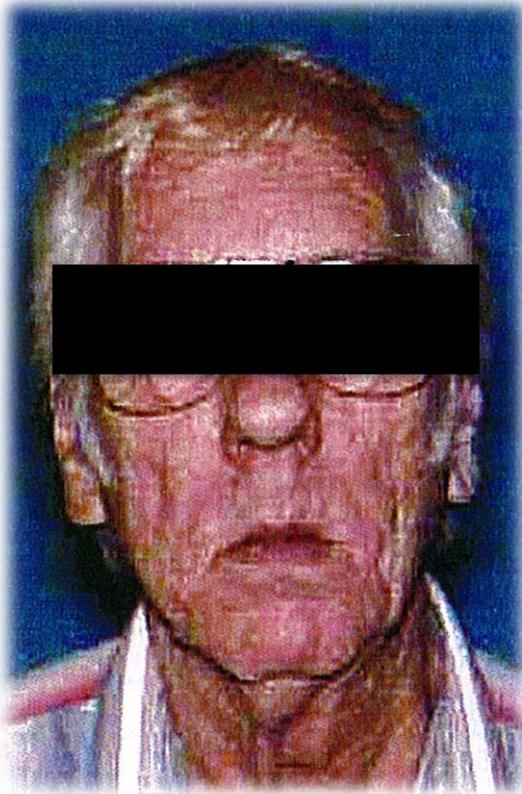


*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

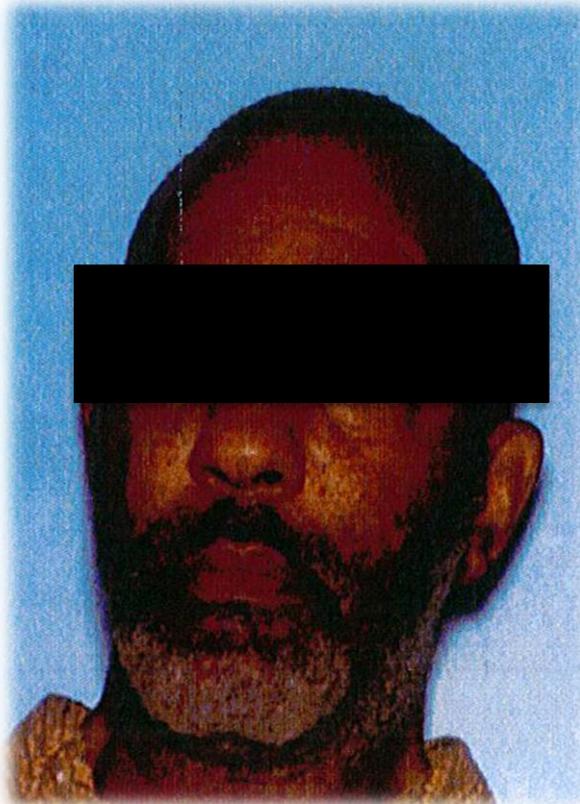


*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# False Imprisonment



Jumped out window.



Kept locked in house.



Kept in basement.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# False Imprisonment



Locked in basement for six months.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# False Imprisonment



Paint bucket for toilet.



Basement prison.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# False Imprisonment



“I thought I might die here. I wanted someone to know I was here.”



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Neglect



*Division of Aging Services  
Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# False Imprisonment



Internal Locks.



Fire Safety Issue.



Common Find.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Financial Exploitation Control of Residents



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Targeted Funds

## Social Security Administration

Type of Benefit	Number of Recipients in GA	Amount Paid in GA
Social Security Retirement	1,448,115	\$ 16.8 Billion
Social Security Disability	333,487	\$ 4.2 Billion
Supplemental Security Income	253,109	\$ 1.6 Billion
<b>Total</b>	<b>1, 734,711</b>	<b>\$ 22.6 Billion</b>

## Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)

	Number of Recipients	Issuance
SNAP	882,115	\$2.8 Billion

## Veteran's Benefits

	Issuance
VA Benefits	\$3 Billion

**Total Targeted Funds: \$28.4 Billion (one state)**

# Financial Exploitation Control of Residents



PINS & deposit dates.



Found in owner pocketbook.



Division of Aging Services  
Georgia Department of Human Services



Georgia Bureau of Investigation

# Financial Exploitation Control of Residents

Resident's body buried  
on property.

Victim of financial fraud



Nicholls, GA



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

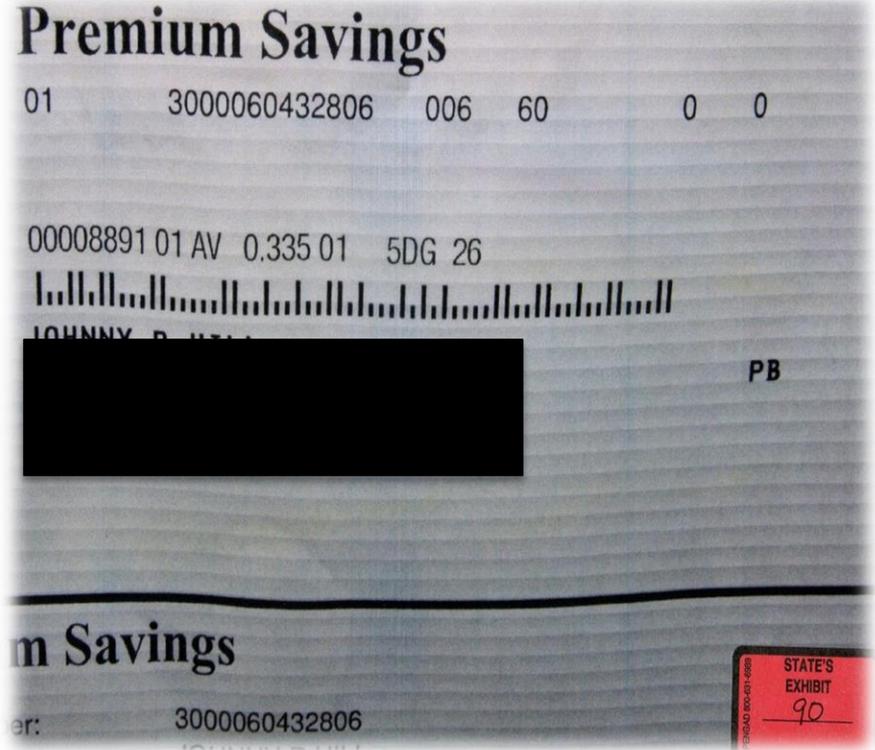
*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Financial Exploitation Control of Residents

## Owners/Operators:

- Have joint Accounts unknown to residents
- Utilities/Rent in residents' names unknown to residents
- Loans in residents' names unknown to residents
- Charging for "food" & demanding EBT at move-in



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Financial Exploitation Control of Residents

## Owners/Operators:

- File tax returns claiming residents as “dependents”
- Have residents return stolen items for cash
- Residents required to work: drive vehicles, oversee residents, enforcement, etc.
- Become Rep Payee
- Draft fraudulent/Coerced POA



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# OWNERS/OPERATORS



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Owners/Operators

Enjoy:

- Luxury Vehicles
- Lavish trips
- Clubs
- Clothes/Shoes
- Lottery Tickets

While residents:

- Live in squalor
- Experience abuse, neglect & exploitation



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# MULTI-DISCIPLINARY RESPONSE



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Multidisciplinary Response



Stay in your lane.



Make new friends.



Persuasion.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Multidisciplinary Response



Collaboration.



Cooperation.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Multidisciplinary Response

- Regulatory Agencies – APS & HFR
- Police
- District Attorney
- Medicaid Fraud Control Unit
- Fire Marshall &/or Code Enforcement
- Non-Emergency Transport for transportation
- Mental Health Services
- Agencies with Housing



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Multi-Disciplinary Response

GA NE - ID(GNE002483)



## GA Abuse, Neglect & Exploitation (GANE) Application (GBI, DHS, Alzheimer's Assoc.)

- Agency: Reporting/Resources
- Contact: APS via app
- GA Law
- Placement – Facilities
- Temp Emergency Relocation Funds - TERF
- Missing Person
- Screenings:
  - ANE
  - Financial Capacity Instrument

*Available on all platforms (IOS, Windows, Android)*



Division of Aging Services  
Georgia Department of Human Services

Georgia Bureau of Investigation



# STATISTICS



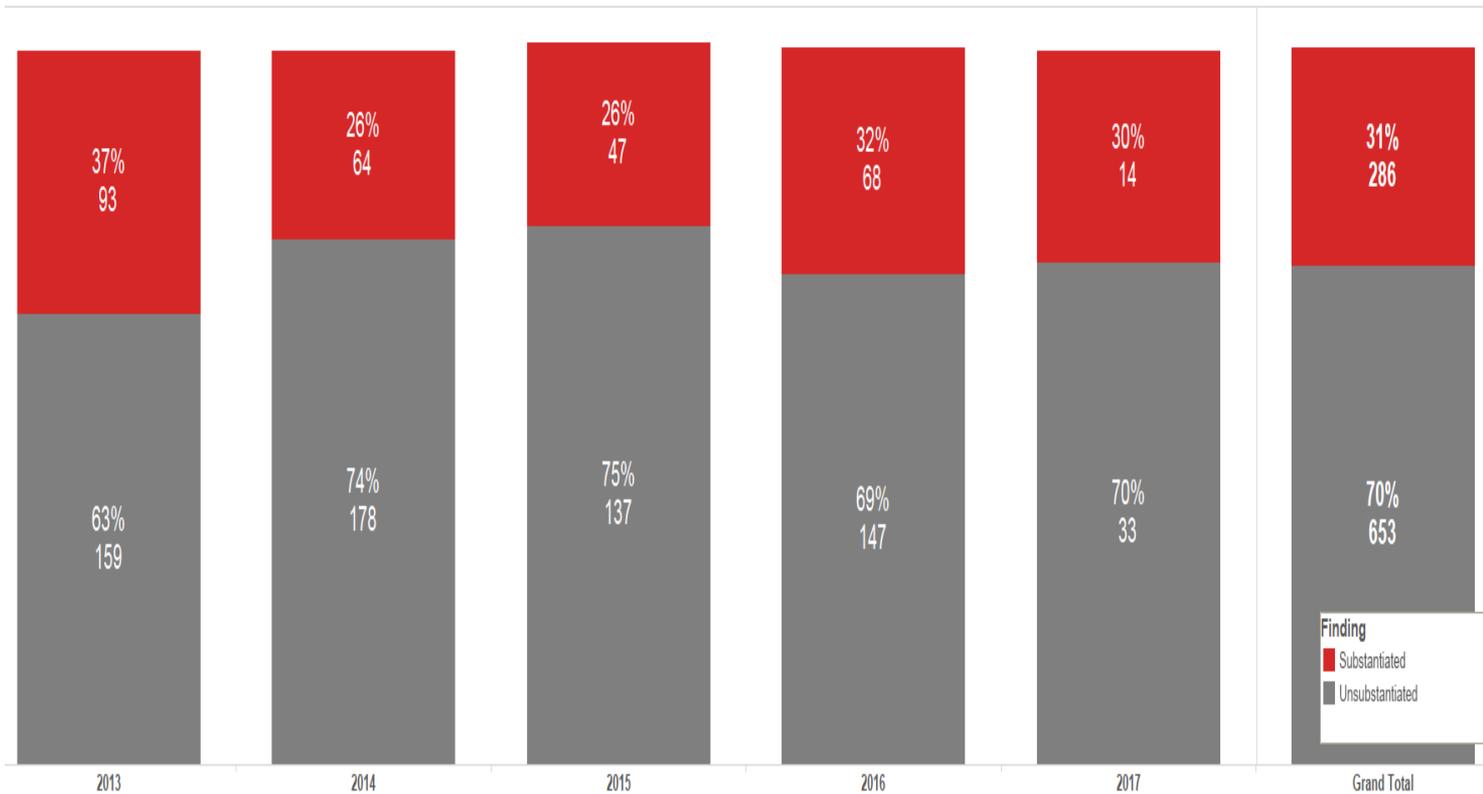
*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Unlicensed Personal Care Homes

Unlicensed Personal Care Homes Substantiated Investigation Percentage



Approximately 30% of unlicensed personal care home referrals to Healthcare Facility Regulation are substantiated.



Division of Aging Services  
Georgia Department of Human Services



Georgia Bureau of Investigation





# OBSTACLES IDENTIFIED



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Obstacles Identified/Addressed: GA

Awareness	2-Day At-Risk Adult Crime Tactics (ACT) Training
Collaboration	Work Group – GBI Working Group
Data/Intel Sharing	GBI Analyst & DAS Epidemiologist
Victim Services	Ongoing training to Victim/Witness Assistance Personnel Prosecuting Attorney’s Council of GA (PACGA)



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Obstacles Identified/Pending: GA

Case Prosecution	Abuse, Neglect & Exploitation Training for Prosecutors by Prosecutors Prosecuting Attorney's Council approved for a specialized state wide prosecutor to assist local DA's.
Multiple Jurisdictions	AG and MFCU authority to prosecute multi-jurisdictional cases involving O.C.G.A. § 16-5-101 and O.C.G.A. § 16-5-102



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Proposed law in GA for: Trafficking an individual for benefits appropriation

A person commits the offense of trafficking an individual for benefits appropriation when that person, through coercion, deception, exploitation, or isolation, knowingly recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides, or obtains by any means an individual for the purpose of appropriating that individual's **financial benefits** for the use of someone other than the individual.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# Proposed law in GA for: Trafficking an individual for benefits appropriation

“Financial Benefits” means public benefits, retirement benefits, health insurance benefits, military benefits, Medicare, Medicaid, health insurance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or other food assistance program, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Social Security or other retirement income benefits, Supplemental Security Income benefits, Social Security Disability benefits, or other similar benefits of economic or financial value to which an individual beneficiary is eligible or entitled.

shall be guilty of a felony, and upon conviction thereof, shall be punished by imprisonment for not less than ten nor more than 25 years and a fine not to exceed \$100,000.00.



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# DHS/GBI Trafficking Team

Pat King  
Forensic Nurse  
FSIU – DHS/DAS



2006

Heather Strickland  
GBI ASAC  
At-Risk Adult Unit



2015

Anna Ayers  
Forensic Specialist  
FSIU – DHS/DAS



2016

Robbin Startzman  
GBI Analyst



2016



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*

*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*



# References

Massachusetts General (2014). Human Trafficking: Guidebook on Identification, Assessment, and Responses in a Health Care Setting.

[http://www.massmed.org/Patient-Care/Health-Topics/Violence-Prevention-and-Intervention/Human-Trafficking-\(pdf\)](http://www.massmed.org/Patient-Care/Health-Topics/Violence-Prevention-and-Intervention/Human-Trafficking-(pdf))

GA General Assembly, HB 770 (2016) <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/770>

O.C.G.A. § 16-5-46 (2015) Trafficking of Persons for Labor or Sexual Servitude.

O.C.G.A. § 37-1-1 (2015) Definitions, Mental Health.

US HSS ASPE (2015) Understanding Unlicensed Care Homes: Final Report. **GA included in report.**

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/200961/Unlicensed.pdf>

18 U.S.C. § 1581, 18 U.S.C. § 1584, 18 U.S.C. § 1589 - §1591,

18 U.S.C. § 1592 <https://www.justice.gov/crt/involuntary-servitude-forced-labor-and-sex-trafficking-statutes-enforced>

US DOS (2000). Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000.

<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/61124.htm>

VERA (2014). Screening for Human Trafficking. <http://www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/human-trafficking-identification-tool-and-user-guidelines.pdf>



*Division of Aging Services*  
*Georgia Department of Human Services*



*Georgia Bureau of Investigation*

# Additional Information/Questions:



## **Heather Strickland**

Assistant Special Agent in Charge

At-Risk Adult Investigations

Georgia Bureau of Investigation

3121 Panthersville Road,

Decatur, GA 30034

[heather.strickland@gbj.ga.gov](mailto:heather.strickland@gbj.ga.gov)

Cell: 678-859-3637



**GEORGIA DEPARTMENT  
OF HUMAN SERVICES**

## **Pat King, RN**

Forensic Special Initiatives Unit

Department of Human Services

Division of Aging Services

2 Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 33-287

Atlanta, GA 30303

[Pat.king@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:Pat.king@dhs.ga.gov)

Cell: 404-831-2093



[www.elderjustice.gov](http://www.elderjustice.gov)

---

# QUESTIONS & SUGGESTIONS

can be emailed to

**[elder.justice@usdoj.gov](mailto:elder.justice@usdoj.gov)**