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June 15 is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Report concerns of abuse, neglect or exploitation of senior and disabled adults

Littleton, Colo. – Every day, vulnerable seniors and disabled adults who cannot fully protect or care for themselves are abused, neglected and financially exploited by caregivers or relatives. More than 5,900 such incidents are reported to Colorado human services agencies and long-term care ombudsmen each year, but sadly, many more go unreported.

Nearly half of these cases involve self-neglect, because the individual does not have the means or ability to meet their own household, medical, hygiene and nutrition needs and doesn't realize that there are resources available to help them remain independent in their homes.

"As we look toward World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15, Arapahoe County is calling on citizens to be vigilant about watching out for elderly or disabled neighbors and take note of any warning signs that they are being mistreated or are self-neglecting," said Arapahoe County Commissioner Nancy Jackson.

Citizens can report their concerns, no matter how small, to the Arapahoe County Department of Human Services abuse and neglect hotline at 303-636-1750. Every report is confidential and anonymous. The County's Adult Protection Team will receive the referral and work to keep vulnerable adults safe and connect them with community-based services, such as assistance with housekeeping, medications or paying bills. Last year, the team supported a caseload of 758 individuals.

Often, warning signs are mistaken as symptoms of a vulnerable adult's frailty or physical or mental disability, but that doesn't mean you should dismiss them. Following are some signs to watch for:

- **Physical Abuse:** Unexplained signs of bodily injury or evidence of being restrained.
- **Neglect or Self-Neglect:** Unusual weight loss, malnutrition or dehydration; unsanitary or unsafe living conditions; being dirty or un-bathed; unsuitable clothing for the weather; evidence of overmedication or undermedication; lack of medical care or untreated physical problems, such as bed sores.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Withdrawal from normal activities; unexplained changes in alertness or other unusual behavioral changes; or threatening, belittling or controlling behavior by a caregiver.
- **Financial Abuse/Exploitation:** Sudden change in finances and accounts; suspicious changes in credit accounts, wills, power of attorney, titles and policies; unusual bank withdrawals; unpaid or

duplicate bills; checks written as “loans” or “gifts;” unnecessary services, goods or subscriptions; missing items or cash; and financial activity the adult couldn’t have conducted.

Also watch for behavioral signs, such as the adult acting withdrawn, nervous, fearful, sad or anxious, especially around certain people, and take notice if a caregiver refuses to allow you to see the adult alone or provides inadequate responses to questions about care.

“You can also help by keeping in contact with older or disabled friends, neighbors and relatives. Maintaining communication will help decrease isolation and give them a chance to talk about any problems they may be experiencing,” said Commissioner Jackson.

Arapahoe County Volunteer Connections offers many opportunities to provide assistance and support for disabled and senior citizens, including:

- ‘Adopting’ a senior and making a commitment to keep in regular contact
- Providing rides for seniors to medical and other necessary appointments
- Assisting with shoveling snow or light yard maintenance
- Supporting clerical needs and sharing information with veterans

To learn more and get involved, please visit www.co.arapahoe.co.us and click on ‘Services’ and then ‘Volunteer Opportunities.’

If you suspect that someone you know is a victim of abuse, neglect, financial exploitation or self-neglect, please call Arapahoe County Department of Human Services at 303-636-1750 to make a confidential report.

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