

**Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing On "Protecting Older Americans from Financial Exploitation"
June 29, 2016**

Today's hearing shines an important light on the need to protect seniors from financial exploitation. Financial fraud costs older Americans an estimated \$3 billion per year. Seniors are particularly vulnerable to this type of crime. They have been exploited through schemes where fraudsters claim to be from the IRS or popular credit card companies to access personal financial information, and schemes where they are tricked into wiring money to the scammers' accounts. With greater numbers of seniors using the Internet, fraud through email is becoming more and more common. What is worse, the FTC estimates that only 1 in 24 of these financial crimes are reported.

With a high proportion of elderly Americans in our state, Vermont has seen an unfortunate uptick in these crimes in recent years. According to the Vermont Attorney General's Office, illegal scams and telemarketing calls are the number one complaint received by the Office's consumer assistance program. Vermont was hit particularly hard by the so-called "Jamaican lottery scam," where callers claimed seniors had won a large sum of money and would trick victims into sending thousands of dollars before they could claim their "prize." This decades-old scam is as sophisticated as it is cruel. It targets seniors, many of whom are low-income or experiencing health hardships, because they are more likely to send money repeatedly before family members can intervene. This scam has cost Americans—mostly seniors—over \$1 billion. These statistics are staggering, and we must do more to combat this type of fraud.

Education campaigns are important to help inform the public, but we must also give prosecutors the tools they need to identify and prosecute these crimes. That is why today, I am cosponsoring the Robert Matava Elder Abuse Victims Act, which takes several steps to address senior financial fraud. The bill expands the prohibition on telemarketing fraud to include fraud conducted over email. It applies enhanced penalties for fraud committed against persons older than 55. It provides Federal assistance to support states' efforts to detect and prevent instances of elder abuse, and requires the collection of data from Federal, state and local law enforcement so we can better understand the problem. This bipartisan bill is a commonsense measure to protect seniors from exploitation. I hope we can follow this hearing with meaningful action by marking up this bill in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Protecting seniors from fraud and abuse is a bipartisan issue. No one wants to see seniors defrauded out of their life savings because of these schemes. No one wants to see those who engage in this type of practice escape accountability. I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about the work they are doing to help protect older Americans from financial exploitation.

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