

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 16, 2025

Erie County Leaders Mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, Urge Community Action to Protect Older Adults

Erie County, NY — In observance of *World Elder Abuse Awareness Day*, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz, Commissioner of Senior Services Randy Hoak, Erie County District Attorney Michael Keane, and Karen Nicolson, CEO of the Center for Elder Law and Justice, came together to speak out against elder abuse and highlight the county's ongoing efforts to protect older adults from neglect, exploitation, and abuse.

Held Old County Hall, the press conference drew advocates, local officials, and members of the community together in a united call for action. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is (WEAAD) is celebrated annually on June 15th,, and during the entire month of June, communities around the world work together to promote an understanding of elder abuse as a public health and human rights issue.

"Too often, elder abuse is hidden in plain sight," said **County Executive Poloncarz**. "It's financial exploitation by someone they trust, it's neglect from caregivers, or it's emotional abuse that leaves deep, invisible scars. Today, we are reaffirming our commitment to protect the dignity, safety, and rights of every older adult in Erie County."

Elder abuse impacts 1 in 10 older adults in the U.S., but many cases go unreported. In Erie County, the Department of Senior Services receives over 3,000 reports of suspected elder abuse each year, a number officials say only scratches the surface.

"These are our parents, our grandparents, our neighbors," said Commissioner Hoak. "With the aging population growing rapidly—by 2030, one in four residents in Erie County will be over 60—we must act now to build stronger safeguards and community networks of support."

District Attorney Keane noted that elder abuse often intersects with criminal activity, particularly in the form of financial exploitation and fraud. "Our office is seeing increasingly sophisticated scams that target vulnerable seniors, draining their life savings and leaving them with little recourse. We are aggressively prosecuting these crimes, but we also need public awareness to stop abuse before it happens."

Karen Nicolson, whose organization provides legal support and advocacy for older adults, emphasized the importance of cross-agency collaboration. "Preventing elder abuse is not the job of one agency or system. It takes community awareness, accessible legal services,

and a justice system that listens to and respects older voices. The Center for Elder Law and Justice is proud to work with Erie County in addressing this urgent issue.”

As part of the event, officials took a moment to honor the dedicated professionals of Adult Protective Services (APS), whose work on the front lines is critical in identifying, investigating, and intervening in cases of elder abuse and neglect. Often operating behind the scenes, APS caseworkers are trusted advocates who respond with urgency and compassion to protect vulnerable adults from harm. “Their work is emotionally demanding and often goes unrecognized, but their impact is profound,” said ***Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz***. “Today, we honor their commitment to dignity, safety, and justice for some of the most at-risk members of our community.”

The event concluded with a symbolic gesture—officials and attendees wore purple, the color of elder abuse awareness, as a sign of solidarity with victims and survivors.

Officials encouraged community members to report suspected elder abuse to the Erie County Adult Protective Services Hotline at (716) 858-6877 or to contact the Center for Elder Law and Justice for legal assistance at (716) 853-3087.

For more information on elder abuse prevention programs in Erie County, visit: www.erie.gov/seniorservices or www.elderjusticenyny.org