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More Ohioans Now Legally Required to Report Suspected Elder Abuse

COLUMBUS, OHIO – September 27, 2018 – Starting on Sept. 29, Ohio law greatly expands the number of individuals required to report suspicions of elder abuse, neglect or exploitation. Mandatory reporters now include many more individuals in the financial services, legal and medical professions – for example, pharmacists, dialysis technicians, firefighters, first responders, building inspectors, CPAs, real estate agents, bank employees, financial planners and notary publics.

“This expansion of mandatory reporters will help us in our goal of protecting our vulnerable family members, friends and neighbors from harm,” said Cynthia Dungey, director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), which supervises Ohio’s Adult Protective Services (APS) program. “Older adults make up the fastest-growing segment of Ohio’s population so all of us need to be vigilant. If you suspect that elder abuse, neglect or exploitation might be occurring, please report it.”

“We work with state and local partners to ensure that our elders are able to live independently, and with dignity and respect, in their homes and communities for as long as possible,” added Beverley Laubert, director of the Ohio Department of Aging. “Each of us must feel empowered to speak up when we suspect that a neighbor, friend or loved one might be the subject of abuse, neglect or exploitation. Likewise, we deserve to know that people who serve our elders daily will take action when they spot warning signs.”

The law changes also require ODJFS to develop and make available educational materials for mandatory reporters. As a result, the agency developed guidebooks for financial services professionals, legal and law enforcement professionals, medical professionals and the public.

Anyone in Ohio can report possible elder abuse 24/7 by calling 1-855-OHIO-APS or by contacting the nearest county department of job and family services (JFS). To find the nearest county JFS, visit jfs.ohio.gov/county. Physical proof or other evidence is not required. Reports can be made anonymously.

If mandatory reporters fail to report possible abuse, they could face criminal charges and fines of up to \$500. Ohio law allows no exceptions for professional relationships – for example, doctor/patient relationships or attorney/client relationships.

Elder abuse can include physical, sexual or psychological abuse, as well as neglect, abandonment or financial exploitation. In addition to physical injuries, the following are just a few of the possible indicators: being isolated, missing appointments, appearing frightened or avoiding specific people, suddenly withdrawing from usual activities or interactions, changes in mood or temperament, changes in personal hygiene, or being resistant to touching.

For more information, see the publication “A Guide to Protecting Ohio’s Elders” (JFS 08025), which is available at <http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/pubs/>. Industry-specific guides for financial services professionals, legal and law enforcement professionals, and medical professionals will be available soon.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services manages vital programs that strengthen Ohio families. These include job training and employment services, unemployment insurance, cash and food assistance, child care, child and adult protective services, adoption, and child support services.

The Ohio Department of Aging serves and advocates for the needs of Ohioans age 60 and older, as well as their families, caregivers and communities. Programs include home and community based long-term supports and services, as well as initiatives to promote health and wellness throughout the lifespan.