

FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION UPDATE

By Brad Vauter

Michigan's Family independence Agency, the Office of Services to the Aging, and other federal, state, and local agencies, along with law enforcement professionals, have been working together over the past several years to combat financial exploitation of the elderly. As an outgrowth of these efforts two initiatives are now underway.

A billboard campaign, to raise awareness about the problem, has been implemented. Modest funding coupled with some donated efforts or space will allow billboards along major Michigan highways to go up with messages about senior exploitation. The billboards feature a telephone number to call when readers want to report a suspected case. The first billboards went up in March, 2003.

The second initiative seeks to establish reporting and investigative protocols between financial institutions and parties such as FIA Adult Protective Services Units. Some financial institutions have been reluctant to offer information about customer accounts short of a court order—even when an investigation by local police or the local FIA Protective Services Units was underway. Consequently, Frank F. Fitzgerald, former Commissioner of Michigan's Office of Financial and Insurance Services (OFIS), issued a letter January 29, 2003, to all Michigan State Chartered Banks and Credit Unions to address the concerns regarding disclosure of nonpublic personal information which might be subject to privacy provisions under the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA).

The letter reads in part: "...To answer that concern and to provide assurance that reporting instances of suspected financial exploitation to the FIA is permitted by exceptions to the notice and opt-out requirements of GLBA, I have enclosed a letter signed by all seven relevant federal regulatory agencies that address this issue. Their position is that abiding by the FIA recommended protocols would not constitute a breach of confidentiality, and certainly should help protect many of your vulnerable adult customers financial security...."

For more information about the effort or to receive copies of the letter call Brad Vauter at (800) 347-5297, ex. 228.