



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

County of Ventura, State of California

GREGORY D. TOTTEN
District Attorney

PATRICIA M. MURPHY
Chief Assistant District Attorney

July 14, 2004

The Honorable Bruce A. Clark
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
County of Ventura Hall of Justice
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, California 93009

Re: **Response to the Ventura County 2003-2004 Grand Jury Report entitled, *Elder Abuse in Ventura County***

Dear Judge Clark:

As required by California Penal Code section 933.05, this letter is a response to the findings and recommendations of the Ventura County 2003-2004 Grand Jury report entitled, *Elder Abuse in Ventura County* (hereinafter "Grand Jury Report").

Many of the findings of the Grand Jury involve processes occurring in departments other than the Office of the District Attorney. I have no knowledge that any of the findings are in error and I concur with the findings 16 and 17, which reference the Office of the District Attorney.

Response to Recommendation:

In reference to the Grand Jury Report's recommendation R-01:

R-01: There is a need for an increased level of outreach with the Ventura County District Attorney's Office Victim Assistance Unit, and the Ventura County Financial Abuse Specialist Team ("FAST") to immediately address the critical needs identified in the elder abuse problem within Ventura County.

I concur that an increased level of outreach to the elder population of Ventura County is needed. In 2003, nearly three hundred victims of elder abuse received services through our Crime Victims Assistance Program. The population of older adults is rapidly rising. The increased numbers of elderly who have home equity, stocks and retirement savings continues to be an

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attractive target for financial abuse. Elders who aren't physically capable of caring for themselves are at risk of physical abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation.

Yet, as the population of older adults is on the rise, resources are being reduced. The Office of the District Attorney has experienced a loss of 20 attorney positions, 12 investigator positions and 16 support staff positions since February 2002. Moreover, our Crime Victims Assistance Program staff has been reduced from 25 to 17 positions due to budget constraints during the same time period. One of the ways we are dealing with the lack of budgetary resources is through volunteer assistance. On average, ten to fifteen volunteers provide between 200 and 500 hours of service per month in assisting victim advocates.

Presently, District Attorney staff reviews reports that are received by our office daily from each law enforcement agency. In elder cases, a victim advocate will make contact with the victim within 72 hours. Elder victims are offered a comprehensive range of services, including crisis intervention, emergency financial assistance, orientation to the criminal justice system, restitution assistance, and application to the State Victim of Crime Compensation Program. District Attorney staff provides elder victims support during court appearances and interviews with law enforcement. District Attorney staff physically accompanies the elder to the courtroom and remain during the court appearance.

District Attorney staff promotes public awareness of services for elder victims through the use of publications, public media and presentations to community groups, service clubs, and senior housing projects. In addition, District Attorney staff attends regular meetings of the Interagency Elder Abuse Council, Ventura County Partnership for Safe Families, and FAST.

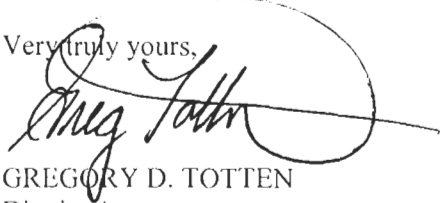
Elder abuse is often the result of the same power and control issues that mark other acts of family violence. Elder abuse thrives in silence. Its victims are often too ill, too afraid, or too embarrassed to ask for help. District Attorney staff operates a Family Violence Prevention Center. The objective of the Center is to provide a range of interventions and services for victims of domestic violence, including elders. Elder victims receive free assistance in obtaining protective orders.

There is a need for resources to allow outreach to adult only communities, homebound elders, mobile home parks and senior living housing facilities in order to educate elders who are less active in the community and thus more vulnerable to victimization. Toward this goal, this office has committed to working with Adult Protective Services to develop a joint presentation to

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educate the community on elder abuse and crime prevention. This will allow the two agencies to share resources. The elder community will directly benefit if more resources become available to do greater outreach.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Totten", written over a large, light-colored oval scribble.

GREGORY D. TOTTEN
District Attorney

GDT/dm

pc: John F. Johnston, County Executive Officer
David Friedlander, Ventura County Partnership for Safe Families
Joan Virginia Allen, Financial Abuse Specialist Team