

Opening Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa  
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Finance  
“Not Forgotten: Protecting Older Americans from Abuse and Neglect in Nursing Homes”  
Wednesday, March 6, 2019

Good morning. I want to welcome everyone to our hearing on an extremely important topic, elder abuse, and thank our witnesses for joining us today.

Elder abuse—and nursing home abuse in particular—has been a topic of ongoing concern to me for the last two decades. As the former chairman of the Senate Aging Committee, for example, I conducted oversight of the nursing home inspection process and convened hearings, focused on enhancing standards and compliance across the nursing home industry.

More recently, I sponsored the *Elder Abuse Prevention and Prosecution Act*, a new federal law that calls for training of elder abuse investigators, collection of data on elder abuse, and collaboration among federal officials tasked with combating seniors’ exploitation. Its enactment was a top priority for me as Judiciary Chairman in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress.

But Congress’ work in this area isn’t done. Hardly a week goes by without seeing something about nursing home abuse or neglect in the national news. Every family has a loved one — a mother, a father, or a grandparent — who may someday need nursing home care. That makes this a topic of enormous concern to every American.

And today, two such Americans are here with us to share their heartbreaking experiences. They are both the daughters of former nursing home residents who were victims of abuse or neglect. First, we’ll hear from a constituent and friend of mine, Pat Blank, whose mother Virginia died in an Iowa nursing home due to horrific neglect. This facility was fined for the mistreatment of Virginia as well as another Iowan, Darlene Weaver. Second, I want to welcome Maya Fischer, whose 87 year-old mother, an Alzheimer’s patient, was brutally raped by a nursing aide. In each of these cases, the victim’s trust was betrayed by the *very* individuals who were entrusted to care and protect them.

Sadly, these are not isolated cases. They could happen to anyone. According to the Inspector General, a whopping one-third of nursing home residents experienced harm while under the care of their federally-funded facilities. And in more than half of these cases, the harm was preventable.

Two years ago, the Inspector General also issued an alert, warning the public about deficiencies cited at nursing homes in 33 states. A significant percentage of these cases involved sexual abuse, substandard care, and neglect.

It is our job to protect America’s most vulnerable citizens, and to prevent them from becoming victims. Many, like the elderly mothers of Maya Fischer and Pat Blank, cannot speak for themselves. Some rely on wheelchairs and walkers just to get up from their beds. Others have mental or cognitive disabilities that prevent them from communicating wrongdoing. We depend

on nursing homes to render the skilled nursing care that many of our loved ones cannot provide on their own.

As chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, I'll continue to make it a top priority to ensure our most vulnerable citizens have access to quality long-term care in an environment free from abuse and neglect. I intend for today's hearing to shed light on the systemic issues that allow substandard care and abuse to America's nursing home industry and to help lead the way to reforms.

I hope to hear from our expert witnesses, for example, about why some nursing home abuse and neglect cases never get reported to law enforcement, as required by law. I hope to hear that we've fixed the weaknesses in the five-star rating system, and that we've cracked down on social media abuse. Every American listening today can be sure I will continue shining the public spotlight on this issue for as long as it takes to fix these problems. It's my hope that the oversight work of this committee will prevent elder abuse from claiming more victims, so that we won't need to call more witnesses to testify about the horrible abuse their mom or dad experienced in a nursing home. Thank you all for joining us. I look forward to your testimony.