Community and Legislative Partners in Aging (CLPA)

February 2020: The House Ad Hoc Committee on Abuse and Neglect of Vulnerable Adults – Findings, Perspective and Next Steps

Panelists:

✓ LD24 Representative Jen Longdon. Ad Hoc Committee Chair
✓ LD13 Representative Tim Dunn, Ad Hoc Committee Co-Chair
✓ Erica McFadden, Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council
✓ Cheryl Knupp, Beatitudes Campus, VPHR and Health Services
✓ Dana Marie Kennedy, AARP, State Director
✓ Elizabeth Ortiz, Arizona Prosecuting Attorneys Advisory Council, Exec Director
✓ Jami Snyder, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, Director
✓ Jose Rico, Arizona Disability Law, CEO
✓ Molly McCarthy, Division of Aging and Adult Services, Assistant Director
✓ Sarah Kader, Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council Director of Operations
✓ Sherri Collins, Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing, Exec Director
✓ Colby Bower, Arizona Department of Health Services, Assistant Director of Public Health Licensing

With the number of Arizona seniors growing exponentially in the next decade, and in response to the 2019 Hacienda incident, the Governor’s Office put together an Ad Hoc Committee to study the abuse of vulnerable persons. As you can imagine, this is a huge topic, so this Committee refined its study to abuse and neglect in facilities. In response to this study, several bills have been introduced this legislative session addressing licensing and oversight of care facilities.

Per the Arizona Department of Health Services (DES), there is a big bubble of seniors heading Arizona’s way between 2020-2026. DES estimates that over 30,000 additional caregivers will be needed. Policy makers are discussing how to leverage state resources to best serve and protect this population, whether they are living alone, at home with professional or family caregivers or in licensed assisted living facilities.

The Committee acknowledged that not all “bad” or negligent care is the result of criminal activity. Some of the reported problems result from a lack of caregiver training, disproportionate caregiver to senior ratios and constant caregiver turnover due to burnout. The Committee agreed that additional appropriations for, and coordination of, training and resources for caregivers is essential.

But some abuse is the result of purposeful neglect. To that end, many of the policy bills this session address frequent background checks, license renewal criteria and facility monitoring and audits.
The representative from AZ Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing stated that deaf persons are the most vulnerable because they may not be able to communicate their needs. Committee members agreed that many senior complaints are ignored or considered unbelievable due to dementia. Advocates, whether family or professional, are essential. Public awareness also assists with advocacy; the Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council representative spoke about the power of digitized survivor stories.

All Committee members agreed that the legislative focus should be on prevention and accountability but acknowledged that getting policy bills passed is a challenge. Each participating agency is actively studying inter-agency improvements and producing recommendations. They were happy for the discussion, but all agreed that what’s really needed is action.

References:

Article: Committee on Abuse of Vulnerable Arizona Adults Meets Again; Loopholes, Funding Cites as Problems: https://kjzz.org/content/1180736/committee-abuse-vulnerable-arizona-adults-meets-again-loopholes-funding-cited

Article: disabled woman who gave birth at a Phoenix care facility was likely pregnant before, documents allege: https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/23/us/arizona-disabled-woman-family-lawsuit-claim/index.html

Article: The “Silver Tsumani” is here – are we ready for it? https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2020/02/06/the-silver-tsunami-is-here-are-we-ready-for-it/

SB1505; nursing supported group homes; licensure. https://apps.azleg.gov/BillStatus/BillOverview

HB2549; adult protective services; audit; appropriation https://apps.azleg.gov/BillStatus/BillOverview.

HB2550; DHS; long-term care facility surveyors. https://apps.azleg.gov/BillStatus/BillOverview

HB2793; group homes; monitoring; appropriation. https://apps.azleg.gov/BillStatus/BillOverview.

SB1283; appropriation; emergency shelter beds; seniors https://apps.azleg.gov/BillStatus/BillOverview/73529.