

The Elder Justice Reauthorization and Modernization Act of 2023

Short Summary

One in 10 Americans over the age of 60 have experienced some form of elder abuse, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, and isolation.ⁱ The *Elder Justice Act* (EJA) programs were created to address the need for prevention, detection, and treatment of abuse of seniors and adults with disabilities, working in tandem with flexible funding from the Social Services Block Grant that many states use to partially or entirely fund their Adult Protective Services (APS) programs. Since then, authorized EJA programs have been chronically unfunded or underfunded. For the first time, in December 2020, Congress provided significant mandatory funding for APS and other programs in the EJA (appropriating \$100 million) and then invested in these programs again in the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (appropriating \$276 million). These initial funds only underscored the fact that additional investments are necessary to meet the growing needs of seniors and adults with disabilities.^{ii, iii}

The Elder Justice Reauthorization and Modernization Act of 2023—introduced by Representatives Richard E. Neal (D-MA) and Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), and Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Bob Casey (D-PA)—reauthorizes the EJA and commits dedicated funding to vital programs, including APS, shown to address the needs of older adults and adults with disabilities. The legislation includes updated and new policies to address medical-legal needs, social isolation, and workforce investments further address policy gaps to protect seniors and adults with disabilities.

The legislation directly appropriates \$4.5 billion for new and existing EJA programs and activities through fiscal year (FY) 2027, including:

- \$1.6 billion for post-acute and long-term care worker recruitment and retention;
- \$1.9 billion for APS functions and grant programs;
- \$232.5 million for long-term care ombudsman program grants and training;
- \$500 million to support linkages to legal services and medical-legal partnerships; and
- \$250 million to address social isolation and loneliness.

The bill creates three new programs to address growing needs underscored by the pandemic:

- **Addresses social isolation** by granting the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) authority to establish a grant and training program for community-based organizations to serve as technical assistance hubs and referral centers to address social isolation among older adults and adults with disabilities. Social isolation is one of the most dangerous and modifiable risk factors of not only elder abuse but also of negative health outcomes that older adults and adults with disabilities face today—a condition exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 2019, there were more than 54 million adults aged 65 and older in the United States, and one-fourth of these adults suffered from social isolation.^{iv}
- **Provides new support for Medical-Legal Partnerships** (MLPs) by establishing authority for the HHS Secretary to fund MLPs to integrate legal assistance and other supports into health and human services settings, which would help clinicians, case managers, and social workers not only improve APS programs but also address challenges at the root of many health inequities impacting seniors and adults with disabilities. MLPs are multidisciplinary teams that combine clinical, human services, and legal staff at a single site of care to ensure individuals' social and legal needs—such as housing, food, education, and access to health care—are met.^v
- **Invests in the post-acute and long-term care workforce** by improving and funding the long-term care (LTC) workforce training program included as part of the original EJA. The bill provides funding to states to recruit, train, and retain this vital workforce. The pandemic exposed clear

deficiencies in protections for the post-acute and LTC workforce, including low wages, lack of career ladders, low levels of access to paid leave and child care, and high turnover rates. More than three-quarters of states reported concerns about reductions in LTC workforce supply during the pandemic. Compounding this crisis is the projected increase in demand for services as the population ages. By 2033, an additional 3.4 million LTC workers will be needed—an increase of 48 percent from today’s already unmet needs.

The *Elder Justice Reauthorization & Modernization Act of 2023* is supported by key national stakeholders, including: [The Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness](#), [County Welfare Directors Association of California](#), [Elder Justice Coalition \(EJC\)](#), [Massachusetts Disabled Persons Protection Commission](#), [National Adult Protective Services Association \(NAPSA\)](#), [National Association of Counties \(NACo\)](#), [National Association of County Human Services Administrators \(NACHSA\)](#), [Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging](#), [Philadelphia Corporation for Aging](#), and [SAGE](#).

ⁱ *Get the Facts on elder Abuse*, NATIONAL COUNCIL ON AGING (Feb. 23, 2021), <https://www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-elder-abuse>.

ⁱⁱ Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-260, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/133/text>.

ⁱⁱⁱ American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319/text>.

^{iv} *Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions*, CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, (Apr. 29, 2021), <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>.

^v *About Medical-Legal Partnership*, NATIONAL CTR. FOR MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP, <https://medical-legalpartnership.org/about-us/faq/> (last visited May 17, 2021).