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**COUNTY KICKS OFF CAMPAIGN TO STOP ELDER ABUSE
Flyers and radio spots to bring attention to the “hidden” problem**

Westchester County is launching a community education campaign to focus renewed attention on elder abuse and let residents know it can help them deal with this growing but often hidden crisis, County Executive Andy Spano announced today.

“Elder abuse is an outrage,” Spano said. “We must do all we can to stop this mistreatment of our senior citizens and assist families in resolving the conditions that lead to such situations. The county is ready and able to do whatever it takes.”

“Face It” flyers in English and Spanish are the keystone of the campaign by the county’s Department of Senior Programs and Services (DSPS) and its Elder Abuse Coalition. Each flyer has the words “Face It” in large letters above the face of one of three senior citizens and DSPS’ elder abuse help line: (914) 813-6436.

They are being mailed to Westchester organizations, houses of worship, government agencies and businesses, such as hair salons and pharmacies, among other places. The mailing includes a letter from DSPS Commissioner Mae Carpenter where she calls elder abuse “an insidious problem,” and asks the recipients to post the flyers in their various locations to heighten public awareness of the issue.

“Face-It” posters in English and Spanish will be placed in the County’s Bee-Line buses. Other parts of the campaign are a one-minute public service announcement (PSAs) for radio stations and small text PSAs for newspapers.

No place is immune to elder abuse. It occurs throughout the United States and around the world. Westchester’s campaign coincides with the second annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15, which is sponsored by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse.

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The network supports the United Nations International Plan of Action, which recognizes the significance of elder abuse as a public health and human rights issue.

Elder abuse can happen in many ways. In one family, an elderly man may have early-stage Alzheimer's so an adult son may use his father's credit cards without his knowledge to buy personal items for himself.

In another home, there could be a daughter who is overwhelmed with fatigue from caring for her invalid mother. One day she loses control and slaps her, causing bruises.

In still another situation, some family members resent that a frail, older aunt had to move in with them. They may express their anger through neglect, perhaps by "forgetting" to give her needed medications or leaving her alone for hours at a time.

Carpenter of DSPS said the county has developed many resources over the years to stop elder abuse.

DSPS opened Safe Centers at three locations in Westchester to give families a place to talk with counselors to resolve bad situations before they get worse. The Safe Centers offer services through a partnership with ElderServe and the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale, the Pace Women's Justice Center and the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services.

Victims of elder abuse also have access to a temporary shelter at the Hebrew Home while family counseling is provided or other living arrangements are explored.

But Carpenter said that despite these efforts, elder abuse continues to rise. Estimates say just one in five cases is reported.

"That's because people are often too ashamed or embarrassed to realize it is even happening let alone talk about it, and that's why we're stepping up our efforts," she said. "Abusing our seniors is a disgrace."