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National Older Americans Abuse Prevention Week, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Each year during May, through the vehicle of Older Americans Month, our Nation honors its senior citizens for their many contributions to our country, its communities, and its families. The vast majority of older Americans are active members of society—working, creating, volunteering, or simply enjoying the fruits of long years of service to others. As parents and grandparents, they extend their contributions through formation of coming generations of our citizens—their children and grandchildren. The commerce of love between generations—fulfillment of a duty and recognition of a debt—is a ballast that steadies our national enterprise on its voyage from past to future.

Not every older American leads an ideal life, however. Regrettably, some suffer from abuse and neglect, wounds all the more grievous for everything these citizens have done to build and strengthen this land of liberty. For these men and women, years that should be full of satisfaction and appreciation become instead manacles of torment and disrespect from which they cannot escape.

Abuse can take many forms—physical, mental, or emotional. It can come from family members, friends, or professionals; it can even be self-inflicted. Neglect is also a form of abuse, a manifestation of carelessness that can be seen even in situations where an elderly person's basic needs for food and shelter are being met. Loneliness, of course, is its most obvious sign, and fortunately the most easily cured by others.

Abuse and neglect reach their ultimate expression, of course, in occasional cases of—and even organized calls for—euthanasia of the elderly infirm. Older Americans have done their duty. In their twilight years, especially, it is our duty to them that matters. No elderly person should live in fear that he or she is a burden to others or that his or her life will be cut short for reasons of utility or convenience. We can never have too many reminders that the gift of life is ours to cherish and preserve from malice and harm until natural death.

Across our country, State and Area Agencies on Aging, social service, and law enforcement agencies are supporting programs to deal effectively with the difficult problems posed by abuse of the elderly. I urge every concerned American to help ensure that local programs are available to educate people about these problems and to assist both the older person and the abuser to get the help they need.

The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 222, has designated the week of May 1 through May 7, 1988, as "National Older Americans Abuse Prevention Week" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of the week.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week of May 1, 1988, through May 7, 1988, as National Older Americans Abuse Prevention Week. I urge all government agencies, every community, and every American to observe this period with appropriate activities and to strive to assure that every older American can enjoy what the poet called that honor, love, and obedience "that should accompany old age."

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fifth day of May, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan