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## EDITORIALS

# Looking Out for Our Elders

## Collaboration can protect vulnerable residents

Senior citizens often fall easy prey to home repair con artists, financial investment crooks and corrupt nursing home operators, whose scurrilous misdeeds drain their bank accounts. Many older citizens also suffer from mental or physical impairments or have outlived friends and family who could assist them. Without an advocate, abuses of all kinds are difficult to prevent, detect and prosecute.

That could soon change, thanks to the newly formed Elder Financial Safety Center, an innovative collaboration of the Dallas County district attorney's office, Dallas County probate courts and Senior Source, a non-profit that assists and connects older adults with resources. Housed within the Senior Source on Harry Hines, the center shares a single client database with the probate courts and DA's office, making it a trusted one-stop shop for seniors in need of financial, insurance, employment and social services.

We applaud this collaboration, which organizers herald as the first of its kind in the nation. Many agencies in Dallas offer aid and advice to senior citizens, but most do it in a limited fashion and without the legal muscle of the probate courts and DA's office. The center promises to break apart those silos so that fewer in need fall through the cracks.

For example, a senior citizen might arrive at the Senior Source seeking financial advice. After reviewing the person's history, case workers might need only to offer assistance as simple as helping a senior fill out a complicated benefits form — or they might discover serious abuse that requires legal intervention.

The center's goal is to provide a safe, secure place for seniors to find impartial informa-

### Elder Financial Safety Center

**Key participants:** DA's office, county probate courts and Senior Source.

**Funding:** \$3.9 million, five-year grant from W.W. Caruth Jr. Foundation at the Communities Foundation of Texas.

**Other key facts:**

- The number of adults over 65 in Dallas County is expected to double to 470,000 by 2030.
- More than 800 active guardianships in Dallas County involve elderly individuals.
- Nationally, two-thirds of seniors will rely on Medicare to pay for health services; 1 in 4 are concerned about ability to afford Medicare costs of deductibles, co-pays and premiums.

tion or get access to a district attorney or probate investigator to fight on their behalf. And the need is only going to increase. By 2030, the number of adults over 65 in Dallas County is expected to double to 470,000. Issues that seniors confidently handled in their youth — such as maintaining safe housing and managing debt — become more difficult on fixed incomes and with rising medical costs.

Molly Bogen, executive director at the Senior Source, said the center wants to improve financial security because it is "the gateway issue to public safety for older adults." Financial fraud by far is the most common form of elder abuse, but seniors can fall victim to other financial pitfalls, including inaction. Bogen said most aging baby boomers don't understand their benefits or fully use services like Medicare.

The Elder Financial Safety Center could become a game changer for seniors in need. It deserves this community's support.