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Bills protecting vulnerable seniors from abuse approved by Senate *HB 4084 introduced by the Elder Abuse Work Group created in 2011*

SALEM – The Oregon Senate backed a bill this morning that will make major changes to Oregon law with respect to elder abuse, creating critical new protections for Oregon’s most vulnerable seniors. House Bill 4084 integrates several recommendations from a work group on elder abuse created in 2011 including increasing the statute of limitation for crimes against the elderly, modifying records disclosure laws to make sure law enforcement can investigate allegations of abuse, and creating a council to review reporting of abuse to determine root causes of abuse and how abuse can be prevented.

“In a time when criminals are creating new opportunities to prey on vulnerable victims, this legislation will arm law enforcement, financial institutions, medical providers, and the agencies charged with protecting Oregon’s elderly with the tools to prevent abuse,” said Senator Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene), a member of the task force that developed HB 4084.

According to the Oregon Department of Human Services, state and local offices investigate more than 11,000 complaints of elder abuse or neglect each year. Oregon’s Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities Abuse Prevention Act defines an elderly person as any person 65 years of age or older. Abuse is defined as physical injury not caused by accident, neglect leading to harm, abandonment, willful infliction of physical pain or injury, unwanted sexual contact or the inability to consent to sexual contact, or financial exploitation.

“Our seniors deserve to be treated with dignity and we have an obligation to look out for those who are least able to care for themselves,” said Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-NW Portland/Washington Co.), a practicing physician. “Many vulnerable seniors depend on assistance from others to take care of their basic needs. While the vast majority of these caretakers do admirable and compassionate work, there must be a system of accountability for those bad actors that take advantage of the most vulnerable.”

HB 4084 was crafted by a diverse work group comprised of legislators, law enforcement, financial institutions, care providers, and state government.

“House Bill 4084 will allow law enforcement to quickly react to allegations of elder abuse, specifically financial exploitation. This legislation will protect lives and livelihoods, and will hold those accountable who choose to victimize our seniors,” said Forest Grove Police Detective Matt Smith, who participated in the work group.

Additional work group members included a district attorney, the AARP, the Oregon Health Care Association, and the Oregon Bankers Association.

“HB 4084 provides important tools for investigators and prosecutors to better protect our most vulnerable citizens. And it addresses the need for greater training and awareness of the signs of abuse and exploitation by those who might report such crimes before irreparable harm occurs,” said Jerry Cohen, Executive Director of AARP Oregon.

HB 4084 also establishes the Resident Safety Review Council, which will be charged with reviewing abuse records in long term care facilities to consider whether the incident is an intentional act of abuse or an adverse event. The Council will report back to the 2013 Legislative Assembly.

The bill now goes to the Governor for his signature.

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