



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE PROTECTION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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"Building Partnerships"
Working Together to Protect
Persons with Disabilities

DA

DPPC

AG's Office

SPDU

Local Police

DDS

DMH

DPH

MASS

MDAA

MRC

MOVA

SANE

MASSACHUSETTS AGENCIES PARTNER IN RESPONDING TO CRIME VICTIMS WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with Disabilities

According to the United States Department of Justice, there are 54 million Americans living with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are some of our most vulnerable citizens. The vulnerability of a person with a disability is heightened especially when they are dependent upon a caretaker. Assistance with daily living activities such as bathing, dressing and personal hygiene fosters dependence and requires close personal contact between the caretaker and a person with a disability.

Persons with disabilities may have an impairment of those abilities critical for self-defense and avoidance of violence, including communication or physical challenges. It is a common misperception that persons with disabilities are asexual, incapable of relationships and not able to engage in sexual acts. Consequently when a person discloses that she or he is the victim of sexual violence or abuse, they are frequently not believed. These situations are unique and place persons with disabilities at greater risk of sexual assault and abuse.

The Building Partnerships Initiative

Building Partnerships for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities (BPI) is a statewide Massachusetts initiative that, using a multidisciplinary approach, links law enforcement, adult protection, human services and others to address violence committed against persons with disabilities. The partnership was formed in 1999 to effectively address abuse, neglect and crimes committed against persons with disabilities. In addition, the partnership was



Courtesy Commonwealth of Massachusetts Art Commission

created to respond to the fact that crimes committed against persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth were not being recognized or reported to the appropriate authorities. Having started as a federally funded Byrne grant program, BPI is currently funded through an award to the Hampden District Attorney's Office from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS).

A BPI steering committee, co-chaired by retired Northwestern District Attorney Elizabeth D. Scheibel and Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC) Executive Director Nancy A. Alterio, oversees the initiative's legislative and training activities. Through the efforts of the steering committee, thousands of persons with disabilities, local and state police, adult protective service investigators, victim witness advocates, assistant district attorneys and human service providers have been trained to effectively recognize, report, investigate abuse and neglect, and prosecute crimes committed against persons with disabilities.

AGENCIES PARTNER IN RESPONDING TO CRIME VICTIMS WITH DISABILITIES

The Memorandum of Understanding

The partnership initiative brings together, through formal Memorandums of Understanding (MOU), the District Attorney, DPPC, human service organizations and law enforcement agencies in each county. The goals of the initiative are to provide protection, treatment and continuity of care for persons with disabilities who are victims of a crime; to increase awareness of crimes being committed against persons with disabilities; to increase communication and cooperation between law enforcement and agencies providing services to persons with disabilities; and to ensure that crimes committed against persons with disabilities are promptly reported, investigated by trained law enforcement personnel and prosecuted by the District Attorneys.

Goals of the Initiative

The goals of the initiative and the multidisciplinary approach are to:

- provide protection, treatment and continuity of care for persons with disabilities who are victims of a crime
- increase awareness of crimes being committed against persons with disabilities
- increase communication and cooperation between law enforcement and agencies providing services to people with disabilities
- ensure that crimes committed against persons with disabilities are promptly reported, investigated by trained law enforcement personnel and prosecuted by the district attorneys

The Steering Committee

A “Building Partnerships” steering committee, chaired by Northwestern District Attorney Scheibel, was formed to facilitate the grant’s legislative and training activities. Through the efforts of the steering committee, local and state police, civil investigators, victim witness advocates, assistant district attorneys and human service providers have received training in recognizing, reporting, investigating and prosecuting crimes committed against persons with disabilities. Legislation has been filed calling for enhanced penalties for those who commit crimes against persons with disabilities.

In addition, the steering committee, with the Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education (MCLE), developed “A Practical Guide to the Reporting, Investigation and Prosecution of Crimes Committed Against Persons with Disabilities.” The guide was distributed to all the courthouses in Massachusetts.

Reporting Abuse and Neglect

Data collected from fiscal year 1997 to present demonstrates the effectiveness of the initiative's approach. Each year, the Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC) receives thousands of reports of abuse and neglect through its **24-hour Hotline** at:

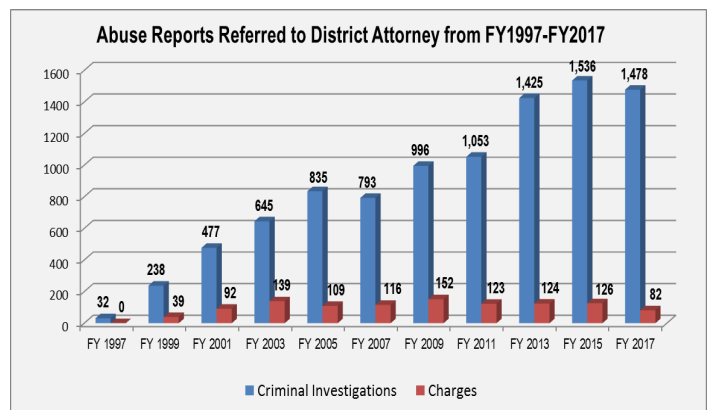
(800) 426-9009 (Voice), 1-888-822-0350 (TTY)

State Police Detective Unit

The State Police Detective Unit (SPDU), assigned to the DPPC, reviews 100% of all complaints received by the DPPC Hotline to determine which ones constitute criminal activity against a person with a disability.

- During fiscal year 1997, prior to the drafting of the MOUs and prior to the implementation of the multidisciplinary approach, the DPPC referred 32 cases to the appropriate district attorneys’ offices statewide for review and action as necessary.
- With the inception of the MOU, in fiscal year 2017, 1,478 cases were investigated criminally resulting in at least 82 criminal complaints.

The following graph depicts the increase in abuse reports referred to the district attorneys for criminal investigation and possible prosecution for fiscal years 1997 - 2017.



The “Building Partnerships” initiative continues to enhance the safety and well being of persons with disabilities and provides the groundwork for effective prevention strategies. The initiative has changed the way we, in Massachusetts, address crimes committed against persons with disabilities and it affords victims with disabilities the same protections and rights as the public at large.

If you would like additional information on the Building Partnerships Initiative, please call (617) 727-6465 x234.