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PRESS RELEASE

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CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE CO-SPONSORED BILL TO PROTECT SENIORS SIGNED INTO LAW

AB 561 Expands Access to Elder Abuse Restraining Orders Through Court Modernization Measures

SAN DIEGO — City Attorney Heather Ferbert celebrated the news that Governor Gavin Newsom has signed AB 561, legislation co-sponsored by the City Attorney's Office and authored by Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva, to strengthen protections for seniors and dependent adults facing abuse. The bill passed the California Legislature with unanimous bipartisan support and was signed into law this week.

AB 561 removes systemic barriers that have long prevented vulnerable populations from obtaining court-ordered protections. The new law aligns Elder and Dependent Adult Abuse Restraining Orders (EAROs) with other restraining order processes by permitting electronic filing of petitions, allowing survivors to appear remotely at hearings without cost, and authorizing courts to approve alternative methods of serving notices when personal service is impractical. These changes streamline access to the courts, reduce trauma for victims, and ensure that survivors are not denied justice simply because of logistical obstacles.

"AB 561 ensures that seniors and dependent adults can access the protections they need without unnecessary barriers," said **San Diego City Attorney Heather Ferbert**. "No one should be forced to choose between safety and the difficulty of navigating the court system. This law makes the process more accessible and more equitable."

Elder abuse remains a serious public safety issue, with one in six adults over the age of 60 experiencing some form of abuse. Transportation challenges, intimidation by abusers, and limited access to legal assistance often prevent seniors from seeking the protection they need. These obstacles became even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when isolation left many older Californians particularly vulnerable to harm.

"Seniors and dependent adults should not have to navigate unnecessary systemic barriers in order to protect themselves from an abuser," said **San Francisco City Attorney David Chiu, immediate past-chair of the Civil Prosecutors Coalition**. "The Civil Prosecutors Coalition supports this commonsense bill that will make protective measures more accessible and improve safety for our loved ones who are vulnerable to physical, emotional, and financial harm."

"Increasing access to courts is a fundamental part of achieving elder justice," said **Vivianne Mbaku, Director of Equity in Elder Justice at Justice in Aging**. "AB 561 increases older Californians access justice and lessens the burdens placed on older adults seeking protection from abuse and exploitation. Justice in Aging is delighted to see Governor Newsom stand with elder justice advocates in increasing the accessibility of the courts."

“As a legal services provider to older and dependent adults experiencing abuse, we often see hesitation by individuals to pursue intervention out of fear and the feeling of being overwhelmed by the need for court intervention. With AB 561, California has improved the process by which older and dependent adults seek relief from the court. This important new legislation better positions older and dependent adults to navigate the court system and obtain the relief they need,” said **Bertha Sanchez Hayden, Associate Vice President, Justice for Seniors & Dependent Adults, Bet Tzedek Legal Services.**

The San Diego City Attorney’s Office is proud to have co-sponsored AB 561 alongside partners San Francisco City Attorney David Chiu, Justice In Aging, Elder Law & Advocacy, Bet Tzedek, and the Civil Prosecutors Coalition. City Attorney Ferbert thanks Assemblymember Quirk-Silva for championing the bill and Governor Newsom for signing it into law.

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