

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Readers' letters and comments are often the most read sections of newspapers and news websites. They are great tools for building awareness about National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW). By writing a letter to the editor, you can link NCVRW or one of your organization's programs to a current local, state, or national issue by showing why readers should care about the rights and concerns of crime victims. Ideally, you would cite a reliable recent study, quote statistics about the crime or issue, or stress the need for more research about crimes that are often hidden or underreported.

Consider asking local law enforcement agencies or other organizations to partner with you, or encourage them to write their own letters to highlight the needs of crime victims and how the public can help. Letters that are endorsed by multiple community groups will receive more attention. When you submit your letter to the editor, include your contact information so the newspaper can

reach you if it decides to print your letter. If the newspaper does not publish your letter, consider submitting it to a local organization that publishes a newsletter, post it on your website, or share it on social media.

5 Elements of an Attention-Grabbing Letter

- Respond to an article or commentary recently published. Begin your letter by citing this article.
- Keep it brief—no more than 250 to 300 words.
- Include a call to action.
- Use verified facts and reference the original sources.
- Include information on where people can learn more about the issue.



SUPPORT VICTIMS. BUILD TRUST. ENGAGE COMMUNITIES.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Protecting Older Adults From Fraud During the Pandemic

In the United States, about 5 million older adults are abused, neglected, or exploited each year.¹ During the pandemic, it's especially horrific that our seniors—who are already at much greater risk from the disease—have also been victims of pandemic-related fraud and exploitation. This kind of financial crime can have an effect far beyond a victim's bank balance; it is associated with a physical decline in health. A recent study of elder abuse found that victims of financial exploitation had mortality rates almost as high as those of victims of caregiver neglect.² Put simply, fraud is a serious threat to older adults' longevity and well-being.

Fraud schemes targeting older Americans are despicable crimes. Scammers have marketed fraudulent tests and exploited fear of the disease to steal information for identity theft. Stimulus check schemes and imposter contact tracers have preyed on older adults who may not have access to their usual sources of trusted information in the community.

By early 2021, over 300,000 coronavirus-related consumer complaints had been filed with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). And we know that older adults have been hit hardest of all. Most people who reported a fraud to the FTC had lost about \$300, but adults over the age of 80—those typically least able to absorb large financial losses—lost more than twice that amount.³

There are ways to protect yourself and your loved ones. In particular, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has a [National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline](https://www.justice.gov/ncj228611) (866-720-5721) for reporting pandemic-related fraud. Hotline staff will obtain information regarding complaints to be reviewed by law enforcement officials. Additionally, the DOJ [National Elder Fraud Hotline](https://www.justice.gov/ncj228611) (1-833-FRAUD-11), managed by the Office for Victims of Crime, provides services to all adults ages 60 and older who may be victims of financial fraud. The toll-free hotline connects victims with experienced case managers who provide personalized support, resources, and referrals to other services. They can also file reports with the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the FTC on behalf of victims.

Elder fraud schemes prey on victims' trust and ruin lives. All of us in the community have a duty to look out for and report these crimes. And we all have a voice to speak up for older victims of exploitation and financial fraud, making our elected officials aware that those most vulnerable need the community's support now more than ever. *[Insert names and contact information of local officials whom readers can contact to raise the issue of support for elder fraud victims.]*

¹ "The Elder Justice Roadmap: A Stakeholder Initiative to Respond to an Emerging Health, Justice, Financial and Social Crisis," Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, accessed January 25, 2021, https://ncea.acl.gov/NCEA/media/Publication/EJRP_Roadmap.pdf.

² Jason Burnett et al., 2016, "Five-Year All-Cause Mortality Rates Across Five Categories of Substantiated Elder Abuse Occurring in the Community," *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect* 28(2): 59-75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08946566.2016.1142920>.

³ <https://public.tableau.com/profile/federal.trade.commission#!/vizhome/COVID-19andStimulusReports/Map>

