

Peggy's Law Aims to Protect Nursing Home Residents from Abuse

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After an “accidental” fall in a Brick Township, New Jersey nursing home landed an Alzheimer’s patient in the hospital, the patient’s daughter advocated for more protection of the elderly. The elder abuse regulations geared to prevent elder abuse are finally law.

Gov. Chris Christie signed [Peggy’s Law \(S-1219\)](#), named for Peggy Marzolla, in August of 2017. The law aims to protect senior citizens in nursing homes from abuse by requiring facility staff to promptly report suspected abuse and exploitation to law enforcement. Previously, staff members were only required to submit cases of abuse to New Jersey’s Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly, but not to the police.

In 2010, Peggy Marzolla, a 93 year-old nursing home resident, was admitted to a hospital with a broken eye socket, a broken jaw, a broken cheekbone, a broken wrist, a badly bruised elbow, a gash on her left shin and welts on her back. Nursing home staff said Peggy slipped on some powder, but her daughter, Maureen Marzolla-Persi, was not convinced.

Peggy Marzolla died 65 days later. The state Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly eventually investigated the incident and accepted the nursing home’s story. Police never conducted an investigation and neither criminal charges nor sanctions were filed against the nursing home.

The nursing facility’s insufficient excuse for her mother’s injuries and law enforcement’s failure to follow up prompted Maureen’s 7-year campaign to enact Peggy’s Law. The new law affects more than 900 state-regulated facilities that house senior citizens, mandating employees to notify police within 24 hours of suspecting abuse, or within two hours if an injury was involved.

Peggy’s Law also requires the ombudsman’s office to offer a 24/7 hotline for complaints. At the time, reporting was only available with live phone calls during business hours.

“Employees have to be the first line of defense against abuse,” said Sen. Diane Allen, a co-sponsor of Peggy’s Law. “They see their residents every day, and they will know when something isn’t right. The families of these seniors have always counted on the employees to do the right thing. Now the State of New Jersey demands it.”

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