



# The Bell Policy Center

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## Crimes Against At-Risk Elders

SB14-098

Testimony to the House Judiciary Committee  
Kathleen Hallgren, policy analyst  
March 18, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony to the committee.

My name is Kathleen Hallgren and I'm a policy analyst with the Bell Policy Center. The Bell is a non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization founded on progressive values and dedicated to making Colorado a state of opportunity for all.

**The Bell Policy Center has strongly supported past efforts to reduce and report on elder abuse in Colorado. As a result, the Bell supports SB14-098, which would clarify language and revise the definitions of crimes against at-risk elders. These changes are suggested by several district attorneys, based on their experience implementing the landmark legislation passed last session (SB13-111) to enact many of the recommendations of the Elder Abuse Task Force. The Bell Policy Center supported the 2013 legislation to require reporting of abuse and set penalties for various types of abuse and supports this bill to make it more effective to enforce.**

The Bell Policy Center has long advocated for policies to help Coloradans accumulate and retain assets. In some cases, this involved protecting consumers from predatory loans; in others, it means advocating for policies to provide retirement security for more Coloradans. A key part of this bill is to ensure the effective enforcement of the statutes protecting at-risk elders from losing their assets through deception, intimidation or undue influence.

We are also very concerned about the large demographic shift that is bearing down on Colorado. This shift poses a number of policy challenges, including how to effectively provide for the long-term-care needs of the growing number of Colorado seniors.

Colorado is facing a dramatic increase in the number of residents aged 65 and over in the coming decade. Between 2000 and 2010, Colorado's population aged 65 and over grew by 32 percent, or 133,552, the fourth-fastest growth rate in the U.S. Of that portion of Colorado's population, those over 85 grew the fastest, increasing by 44 percent, or 21,397.<sup>1</sup>

The State Demography Office projects that Colorado's population aged 65 and over will increase by 61 percent, or 342,000, from 2010 to 2020. Most of this growth will be driven by the large number of baby boomers currently living in Colorado who will be growing older. The demographer predicts that Colorado's baby boomers will be entering the 65-74 age cohort at a rate of 7 percent per year, or 70 percent between 2010 and 2020. This is faster than the 4.2

percent-per-year rate projected for the nation as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

Current research shows that 70 percent of Americans who reach age 65 will need some form of long-term care, with about 20 percent of them requiring care for five years or longer.<sup>3</sup> Providing this care will put a significant strain on the seniors, their families and, for those who qualify for Medicaid, the state budget. This unprecedented demographic shift, along with the increasing demand for long-term care, will also expand the opportunity for various forms of elder abuse.

We believe that it is better and less expensive for seniors, their families and the state budget if more of them can get long-term care at home. An important aspect of keeping seniors in their homes longer is to ensure that policies are in place to protect them from physical, financial and emotional abuse. Requiring those who regularly come in contact with seniors to report suspected abuse and creating processes for investigating and prosecuting abuse should help reduce the number of at-risk elders who are abused. This should give seniors and their families more certainty that they are safe to remain in their homes.

We support SB14-098 because it clarifies definitions and addresses concerns raised by district attorneys to improve the enforcement of statutes prohibiting abuse of at-risk elders.

We thank Representatives Foote and Schafer for bringing this bill to you today and thank the committee for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you.

If you would like more information or if I could answer any questions, please contact me at [hallgren@bellpolicy.org](mailto:hallgren@bellpolicy.org) or 303-297-0456x220.

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<sup>1</sup> [Aging in Colorado](http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/DOLA-Main/CBON/1251593240528), Department of Local Affairs, State Demography Office, July 2012, <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/DOLA-Main/CBON/1251593240528>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Colorado Health Institute: Long-Term Services and Supports in Colorado, November 2011, Updated September 2013 <http://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/key-issues/detail/legislation-and-policy/long-term-services-and-supports-in-colorado-piecing-together-the-puzzle-1>