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**District Attorney and Chief Investigator Issue Statement Recognizing  
Elder Abuse Awareness Month**

**SANTA BARBARA, Calif.**, June 1, 2026 - Elder scams are not rare, isolated incidents, they are a growing threat affecting families in every community. Many of us know someone who has fallen victim to fraud, whether through a fake phone call, an online scheme, identity theft, romance fraud, or a financial deception disguised as legitimate business. These crimes may vary in size and sophistication, but they all share one thing in common, they cause real harm to real people.

According to the FBI, in 2025 there were 357 complaints filed in Santa Barbara County alone, resulting in reported financial losses totaling more than \$34 million. Those numbers are staggering, but unfortunately not unexpected for those of us who hear about these scams weekly, if not daily. We have a crisis. And these figures only reflect reported losses. We know this type of crime is significantly underreported and under documented because many victims feel embarrassed, fearful, or uncertain about coming forward. In many cases, victims and their families are also confused about where to report these crimes or which agency can help, especially when scams involve online activity, financial institutions, multiple jurisdictions, or international actors. That confusion often leads to delays in reporting or no report being made at all, allowing criminals to continue victimizing others.

Scams and fraud come in many forms. On one end are sophisticated international fraud rings that steal billions of dollars each year from the American people through phishing schemes, identity theft, fake tech support calls, and cybercrime. On the other end are the more personal and local betrayals, including dishonest caregivers, acquaintances, or opportunists who take advantage of vulnerable seniors, especially those who have accumulated wealth through a lifetime of hard work, savings, or property ownership in communities such as Santa Barbara. These crimes may look different, but the damage they cause is the same. We must stop treating scams as minor inconveniences or “civil matters”. Fraud is a crime. It has victims who often lose not only money, but also confidence, dignity, and peace of mind. For older adults in particular, the emotional toll can be devastating.

As our population ages, the urgency of this issue grows. Seniors are often specifically targeted because scammers believe they are more trusting, more isolated, or more likely to have savings and assets. At the same time, law enforcement agencies are facing budget cuts, staffing shortages, and competing priorities. Resources are stretched thin. That is exactly why prevention and education must become central strategies in protecting our communities.

This crime is not going away. In fact, it is evolving and expanding every year. We need everyone in our community to take fraud and financial elder abuse as seriously as the other crimes that receive regular media attention and public concern.

June is Elder Abuse Awareness Month, making it an especially important time for all of us to come together and shine a light on this growing crisis. It is an opportunity to educate ourselves, support victims, check in on vulnerable neighbors and loved ones, and urge our leaders and institutions to prioritize prevention, enforcement, and victim services. Awareness must lead to action.

Our community has already shown what this kind of collaboration can accomplish. The District Attorney's Office partners with law enforcement and provides support for complex financial crime investigations. Montecito Bank and Trust participates in our Scam Squad podcast to educate the community about scams currently targeting local residents. Media leaders such as KEYT anchors C.J. Ward and Beth Farnsworth regularly invite me to highlight scams affecting the community. Retirement homes also host educational speakers on fraud prevention, and professionals who work closely with older adults, including realtors, regularly provide scam awareness presentations. Together, these efforts are building stronger awareness and helping protect those most at risk.

Education remains one of the most effective tools for prevention. Encouraging people to pause before sending money, independently verifying requests, avoiding sharing personal information under pressure, and reporting suspicious activity can stop many scams before they succeed. The more openly we talk about fraud, the more we reduce the secrecy and manipulation that criminals rely on.

As we recognize Elder Abuse Awareness Month, we must continue working together to protect our community from fraud and scams. Every conversation, every educational presentation, every suspicious transaction reported, and every effort to check on a vulnerable friend, neighbor, or family member can make a difference. The call to action is simple: stay informed, speak openly about scams, report suspicious activity, and help educate those around you. By remaining vigilant and united, we can strengthen our community's ability to prevent fraud, support victims, and protect older adults from those who seek to exploit them. If you are actively being targeted by a scam or fraud, contact law enforcement immediately and report it to IC3.gov. If you were targeted in the past or recognized a scam attempt, email [reportfraud@countyofsb.org](mailto:reportfraud@countyofsb.org) to help protect others. You can also stay informed by listening to the Scam Squad podcast on KTMS Newstalk 990, Apple Podcasts, or YouTube.

*Kristina Perkins is the Chief Investigator for the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Office and host of the weekly podcast Scam Squad, dedicated to educating the community about current scams and fraud trends. She regularly leads outreach and education efforts on fraud prevention and is deeply committed to public safety and holding offenders accountable.*

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