

Elderly Abuse at Warren Manor

by
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It's difficult to comprehend but there exists a criminal element today that preys upon elderly people. Elder abuse is a general term for the mistreatment of older persons. It usually is linked with physical or psychological abuse but it is increasingly linked with financial exploitation. The victims are especially susceptible if they are lonely or barely competent. The problem is further exacerbated if they live in public housing in many counties across Pennsylvania.

In Apollo, the problem grows worse daily in a high-rise known as Warren Manor. Most who live or work there will readily tell you there is a problem. No one would give their name for this article which is all you need to know about how terrible the problem is.

Warren Manor is maintained by the Armstrong County Housing Authority. Once it was the exclusive domain for people older than 62 years of age. It was a place where many used to leave their doors open.

But dubious legislation was passed reforming the system. The housing authority is bound by the US Department of Housing and Urban Redevelopment (HUD) requirements and in 1993, the requirements changed. Younger people that met certain specifications were granted residency in Warren Manor. According to the new HUD guidelines, anyone 62 or older or handicapped, disabled or displaced by government action regardless of age must be granted public housing provided they meet the Housing Authority's requirements. A "disability" is usually determined under the social security disability program but there are other disabilities which HUD may qualify.

The social security disability program defines disability as "the inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity by any reason medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months." A disability can be almost anything including deep-rooted psychological problems. Should younger people with these kinds of debilitating disabilities be living next to older people? If they were our parents or grandparents, would we think so?

Armstrong County has a rigorous screening process before anyone can gain admittance and certainly there are good younger people that reside there. Unfortunately, there are some that have gained admittance through the years that have taken advantage of too many older people. Criminal records are checked but only in places where the applicant has volunteered information about where he/she lived. This means that if someone had a criminal record a mile long in California but didn't note that he/she lived in California, he/she would pass the criminal screening process to qualify for public housing provided

that person qualified under HUD guidelines for being disabled. HUD agencies are not allowed access to the national criminal clearinghouse that police departments employ.

Prior to March 29, 1996, alcoholism was considered a disability. This means that someone receiving supplemental security income (SSI) for an alcohol problem could qualify for HUD housing regardless of age. Once they have been granted housing and the disability benefits have run out, they are still allowed to live in public housing.

The result has been easy pickings for someone who has gained admittance and desperately needs to support an alcohol problem or a drug addiction. The worst crimes are committed once a victim's confidence has been gained. Money, checks and valuables are unknowingly stolen. There are some who beg for money claiming they do not have enough to eat. There are others who ask to borrow money without any intention of paying it back.

Younger people on SSI do need good places to live but why are they being mixed with these older people? There is a HUD provision for public housing facilities which is strictly for the aged. Allegheny County has some of their facilities with this designation. The Armstrong County Housing Authority should seek one for Warren Manor.

This is a despicable situation brought on by a set of well-intentioned guidelines bereft of common sense. In Apollo, the dignity of our older citizens is at stake.



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