

New Jersey GOP Candidate Declares War On Elder Abuse: America's Forgotten Crime

By NWV Senior Political News Writer, Jim Kouri



This week, Morris County, New Jersey's GOP Freeholder and private-practice attorney Heather Daring officially threw her hat in the ring and announced her Republican Party candidacy for Morris County Surrogate. She hopes to step into a special election being held to replace the current County Surrogate, John Pecoraro, who said it is his time to retire at the end of this term.

"My 15 years of legal and business experience in private practice, having provided legal representation to many individuals in the Morris County Surrogate's Court along with my personal experiences will ensure that the benefits to the individuals served by this office are maximized," said Darling, a Seton Hall University School of Law graduate.

While she said she loves being a Morris County Freeholder, she believes that as a Surrogate, her legal and life experience will benefit those senior citizens who are not only abandoned in many cases, but are also physically and psychologically abused by the own families, healthcare workers and even those who are supposed to protect them and their interests.

Elder abuse in the United States is not a new pathological

phenomenon, but unfortunately for far too long it never garnered the public or news media attention it deserved until recently.

According to former New York Police Detective Ellen King, awareness of “granny battering” has increased following the House Select Committee on Aging hearings about elder abuse in the United States. An amendment to the Social Security Act created Adult Protection Services (APS), which was originally designed to protect adults with physical and/or mental limitations, but its mission was later expanded to encompass cases of physical and mental elder abuse as well.

Sadly, just passing legislation or “rearranging the deckchairs on a sinking ship” did little to alleviate the pain and sorrow experienced by the elderly, especially those suffering from physical and mental disabilities.

“This vacancy in the Surrogate’s Office offers an opportunity for me to bring new ideas and make significant changes for the benefit of seniors and special needs citizens in Morris County,” said Ms. Darling, a Roxbury Township resident.

Her experience with the elderly began even before sitting for – and passing – the New Jersey Bar Exam. While attending Seton Hall University School of Law, Heather J. Darling was teacher’s assistant to her family law professor and she participated in Seton Hall’s Fair Housing Clinic assisting victims of predatory lending schemes. Following her graduation Heather was a law clerk to the Honorable Phillip B. Cummis, J.S.C. in the exceedingly busy and diverse Essex County Family Court after completing law school.

Elder abuse is defined by law enforcement as the “intentional or neglectful acts by a caregiver or ‘trusted’ individual that lead to, or may lead to, harm of a vulnerable elder.”

According to Detective King, whose career included a professorship at the world famous John Jay College of Criminal

Justice in New York City. It is often a “hidden offence, often perpetrated against vulnerable people, many with memory impairment, by those on whom they depend,” said King.

Elder abuse is common, with one study suggesting that it may affect as many as 1 in 4 vulnerable older people. According to the National Council on Aging, approximately 1 in 10 Americans older than 60 years has been the [victim of abuse](#), including physical abuse, psychological or verbal abuse, sexual abuse, financial exploitation, or neglect.

According to the National Association of Chiefs of Police, given the rapidly burgeoning population of older adults in the United States, the number of potentially abused elders is staggering: in 2015, older adults – defined as people age 65 years or above (47.8 million) constituted nearly 15% of the US population – up by 1.6 million from 2014. It is projected that by 2060, the number will reach 98.2 million, comprising nearly one-fourth of US residents as the “Baby Boomers” age and as life expectancy is expected to increase. Of these, 19.7 million will be age 85 years or older.

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