



Date: February 5, 2026

To: Chair Duchow and members of the Assembly Committee on Financial Institutions

From: Janet Zander, Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator

Re: For Information Only - AB 972 re: Financial exploitation of vulnerable adults

Thank you for the opportunity to testify for information only on Assembly Bill 972. My name is Janet Zander, and I serve as the Advocacy and Public Policy Coordinator for the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc. (GWAAR). I also provide policy and advocacy support to the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN). Both WAAN and GWAAR are dedicated to advancing policies that help older adults live safely and independently in their own homes.

Historically, aging network advocates have been cautious about supporting policies that allow financial service providers to refuse or delay transactions when financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult is suspected. While protecting individuals from fraud and scams is a shared priority, these proposals have raised concern. The concerns included potential infringements on personal autonomy, the risk of overreach or erroneous denial of legitimate transactions, challenges in distinguishing fraud from poor or risky—but lawful—decision-making, and the very real harm that can occur when access to funds is mistakenly restricted. In some cases, frozen accounts can create immediate and severe financial stress for older adults who rely on timely access to their money for housing, food, medications, and other essentials.

At the same time, the landscape of fraud and financial exploitation has changed dramatically. According to the Federal Trade Commission, Wisconsin consumers and businesses lost more than \$107 million to fraud in 2025. The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center reports that in 2024 alone, Wisconsinites age 60 and older experienced more than \$50 million in reported losses due to fraud and scams. These numbers reflect only a fraction of the true scope of the problem.

The consequences of financial exploitation extend far beyond financial loss. Victims face increased risks of depression, anxiety, loss of independence, diminished trust in others, and even premature death. For individuals living on fixed incomes, significant financial losses can result in the loss of housing, the inability to afford necessary medical care, and the depletion of lifetime savings—leaving them unable to meet basic needs or remain independent. Many victims do not report exploitation due to shame, embarrassment, or self-blame, meaning the harm is often hidden and unaddressed.

Given these realities, fraud and scams are robbing too many older Wisconsinites of their hard-earned resources. For this reason, we now support allowing financial service providers, under carefully defined

circumstances and subject to the safeguards outlined in AB 972, to place limited holds on financial transactions as a tool to help prevent financial exploitation.

We do, however, have concerns with a specific provision of AB 972. Notwithstanding s. 244.20, the bill allows a financial service provider to refuse to accept or acknowledge a power of attorney if the principal is a vulnerable adult and the provider has *reasonable* cause to suspect financial exploitation. The bill does not include time limits on such refusals, nor does it require financial institutions to take any follow-up actions, such as reporting their concerns or seeking further validation of their concerns. As written, this provision appears to permit an open-ended refusal to honor a legally valid and binding document that authorizes a trusted agent to manage an individual's financial affairs.

Thank you for your time and for considering this information as you deliberate on AB 972.

The Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc. (GWAAR - <https://gwaar.org/>) is a nonprofit agency committed to supporting the successful delivery of aging programs and services in our service area consisting of 70 counties (all but Dane and Milwaukee) and 11 tribes in Wisconsin. GWAAR is one of three Area Agencies on Aging in Wisconsin. GWAAR provides lead aging agencies in our service area with training, technical assistance, and advocacy to ensure the availability and quality of programs and services to meet the changing needs of older people in Wisconsin. GWAAR is also a member of the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN - <https://gwaar.org/wisconsin-aging-advocacy-network>) a collaboration of organizations and individuals working with and for Wisconsin's older adults to shape policy solutions that ensure we can all thrive as we age.

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