

# Advice about scams targeting seniors

BY RODNEY BROOKS  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, has served in the Senate since 1997 and has chaired the Senate Special Committee on Aging since last January. In that role, she has held multiple hearings on scams aimed at seniors and retirees. We spoke about those scams — the new ones and the old ones. This has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q:** What is the Senate Special Committee on Aging doing to fight these scams aimed at seniors and retirees?

**A:** We're continuing to investigate scams that are targeting seniors and our retirees. We established a toll-free fraud hotline [1-855-303-9470]. It received an astonishing 1,100 calls last year from all 50 states. Sometimes there are calls from seniors asking us about scams that they have been approached with and ask what they should do. Other times it is calls from seniors alerting us that there are new scams out there. Other times there are calls from seniors telling us how they have lost thousands of dollars as a result of scams.

We try to help them by connecting them to local law enforcement or the [Federal Trade Commission]. In one case, we were able to act quickly enough that we were able to get the bank to stop the money transfer. In another case, we were able to get law enforcement involved in time that they made arrests.

In the case of one infamous scam, the Jamaica lottery scam, the most frequent one, the Department of Justice prosecuted a Jamaican and had him extradited. He got 20 years. The U.S. has had the Jamaican government crack down on these



Sen. Susan Collins discusses the priorities of the Senate Special Committee on Aging recently at her home in Bangor.

con artists operating from boiler rooms in Jamaica.

**Q:** What are the newest scams aimed at seniors and retirees?

**A:** One is the IRS imposter scam. That is especially prevalent this time of the year. Last year we received 387 calls on the IRS imposter scam. In that case, a con artist pretends that they are an IRS agent and falsely accuses seniors of owing back taxes and penalties and demands immediate payment through money orders or cards that are available at drugstores. What's really pernicious about these scams is the con artists have figured out how to get around caller ID and spoof the telephone number of the Treasury Department. If the phone rings in your house and you have caller ID, it will say the U.S. Treasury

Department. People will pick up the phone and believe it is a legitimate call. It makes the National Do Not Call Registry a woefully inadequate means of protection.

**Q:** Discuss some of the other scams.

**A:** One is the computer technical support scam. A senior will receive a call from someone who pretends to be from Microsoft or Dell or some other computer company telling them that their computer has been infected with a virus and they need information in order to solve the problem. What they do is trick the consumer into giving them the codes. They walk them through the process. They get access to the consumer's computer. Then they do one of two things.

They say we fixed the

virus and you owe us. If the senior says we don't have that much money, they give them a senior citizen discount. In the other case, they will plant a virus that, if the senior is using online banking, can gain access to their passwords and their financial accounts and will try to steal money by impersonating the senior's computer.

We held a hearing on that. Microsoft is working hard to try to fight that kind of scam and let people know they will not receive phone calls from Microsoft saying that you have a virus and demanding payment to fix it. That's a new one. We didn't know that one was out there until we started getting calls.

**Q:** What about the grandparent scam? Is that one still prevalent?

**A:** That is a perennial one. I was almost a victim of this one a few years ago. In this case what happens is a senior will get an email that appears to be from a grandchild. In my case, it appeared to be from my nephew. It says the grandchild is overseas and has been robbed and lost all their money, airplane ticket home and passport. It is a sob story that sounds very authentic. It really sounded like it was from one of my nephews. Rather than wiring him money, which was the request, I told him to go to the American embassy and get help, including a new passport. Mine wasn't a very sympathetic reply. I started thinking about it and didn't think he was overseas and called his father. It was a very convincing email. And that scam

has been going on for years. But it keeps appearing.

**Q:** Talk about some of the other most popular scams.

**A:** One that is still popular is the home improvement scam. Then there's the romance scam, where a person develops a relationship by calling regularly and then asks for money to buy an airplane ticket to come see the person. That's sad because it's usually lonely seniors living alone that fall victim to those scams.

**Q:** What's your best advice for helping people avoid these scams?

**A:** The fact that we received more than 1,000 calls shows how valuable it is to publicize these scams. The more we can prevent people from falling victim to these scams, the better.

My advice to seniors is that if they have any concerns about whether a call they get seeking money is legitimate, they should not send the money. And most of those calls are scams. If they have any concerns or questions, call our fraud hotline or their local police department. Or talk with their adult children or the AARP. Don't send money and find out later that you regret it.

Secondly, if adult children who have access to their parent's checking accounts start seeing unusual withdrawals, they should ask questions. The state of Maine has a program called the Senior Safe program that trains bank tellers and credit union tellers to look for unusual withdrawals from seniors' accounts. We are trying to get through federal legislation that would do something similar on a national level.

There's the adage if it sounds too good to be true, it probably isn't true. If you won a lottery that you haven't entered, beware.

## Sheriff aims to solve drug crisis

BY DEBORAH MCDERMOTT  
YORK WEEKLY

YORK — York County Sheriff William King said the average daily population of the county jail is around 240, but it typically goes down significantly during Christmas week as prisoners jockey to get out.

This past Christmas, 270 prisoners were at the jail. Why? In part because a burgeoning number of drug dealers being arrested on the turnpike in York County on their way north to sell heroin and ended up in jail awaiting court appearances.

The anecdote was shared with about 75 people from throughout York County and beyond who gathered at the York Public Library to discuss and seek solutions to an opioid prescription drug and heroin problem that experts say is spiraling upward with every passing year.

The trends are troubling, said Roy McKinney, of the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency. In a 2013 study, Maine was No. 2 in overall opioid use among eight states studied. The number

of drug induced deaths increased six fold in just a decade, he said. And then in 2014, "heroin came on the scene with a vengeance."

The dealers are part of "trafficking organizations from Massachusetts and New York, and they're coming to Maine and bringing their violence with them," said Agent Mike Wardrop of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

And they're selling to "normal everyday people who got addicted to opiates legally to begin with. It's affecting every segment of our society. It scares me to death to see it in our schools," said York Police Chief Douglas Bracy.

Several themes emerged among the law enforcement, treatment, medical, school and prevention professionals on a forum panel, though. Chief among them was cooperation between and among these groups, as everyone looks to find solutions to a problem in a state that has limited funds. But several people also talked about the need for residents of each community to address addiction, and not marginalize it.

Among those speaking was Matt Braun, who has been in recovery for the past six years and has started a Biddeford chapter of Young People in Recovery. He said it's difficult enough freeing yourself from addiction but it is made harder when the communities where they live turn away.

"It troubles me when I see people like me discriminated against. Landlords don't want to rent to us, employers don't want to hire us. So recovery isn't very visible for those reasons. People don't want to tell. Even though I've become a productive member of society and I'm bettering my community, people still see me as that same person."

The treatment, prevention and school people on the panel said it's clear from the data that many adults who have addiction problems started when they were 13 and 14 years old. York High School Principal Meghan Ward and Traip Academy Principal Eric Waddell said they are working to identify and help students who are exhibiting at-risk behavior.

Ward said she is looking into training educators to assess student behavior so they can recognize "when someone is coming to the school high or substance involved. Once we do that, we want to make sure we have the resources at our local disposal. We have a social responsibility to get our students on the right path," she said.

Caren Klein of the Cottage Program at York Hospital, an intensive outpatient recovery addiction program, said "unfortunately, there's not a lot of substance abuse services in York County. I wish there was more money out there for other agencies. For instance, there should be substance abuse counselors at all of our high schools. And there really isn't that much."

Dr. Robert Hulefeld, director of emergency services at York Hospital, said it's an "uncomfortable topic" for doctors, "who have a mandate to alleviate pain and suffering but also have a social responsibility to patients and their families." He said he'd like to see prescription monitoring pro-

## NYC man, Oakland woman arrested in heroin bust

BY RYAN MCLAUGHLIN  
BDN STAFF

OAKLAND — A New York City man and an Oakland woman were arrested Thursday in a heroin bust, according to Maine Drug Enforcement Agency officials.

An investigation into trafficking by Kendell Cagle, 27, and Shayna Shaw-Jenney, 25, has been going on for roughly two months, MDEA Cmdr. Peter Arno said.

Both are facing a charge of aggravated trafficking in heroin, according to Arno.

MDEA and Oakland police had been collaborating on an investigation involving individuals from New York engaged in heroin distribution from a Hill Street apartment, and drug agents were able to conduct numerous undercover purchases, Arno said.

On Thursday, MDEA agents, Oakland police, state police and Kennebec County sheriff's deputies executed a search warrant at the apartment, arrested Cagle and Shaw-Jenney and reportedly seized nearly 100 grams of heroin and \$1,800 in suspected drug proceedings.

Bail for Cagle, also known as "Gudda," was set at \$25,000 cash. Shaw-Jenney's bail was set at \$5,000.

More arrests are anticipated.

grams cross state lines so there can be a true picture of doctor shopping, and more treatment options, community resources and AA-type programs.

"This is part of my daily life. This is a problem," he said.

King said he recalls hearing about people

stranded on rooftops of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina begging to be rescued. "If that happened in Maine, no one would be on the rooftop saying, 'help me, help me,' because we'd help them. We're going to solve this. It is a challenge, but we'll solve it because we're Mainers."

## Bath woman charged with stalking

BY BETH BROGAN  
BDN STAFF

BATH — A Bath woman was arrested Jan. 17 and charged with domestic violence criminal stalking and criminal trespass after allegedly smearing dog feces on the windshield of a man's vehicle, then waiting in her car for him to come outside.

Keirsten Harte, 40, was also charged with operating under the influence, according to Bath Police Lt. Robert Savary. The three charges are all Class D misdemeanors.

Officers went to Somerset Place on the evening of Jan. 17

after receiving a report from a friend of the alleged 43-year-old victim that dog feces had been smeared on his windshield and that Harte was waiting in her car outside the victim's vehicle, according to the arrest report.

"There was a history between the two of them," Savary said, and police had served a no-trespassing warning several weeks earlier. "Based on their past history and the circum-



Harte

stances, and the fact that it was an ongoing issue, we charged her with domestic violence stalking."

Harte was released from Two Bridges Regional Jail in Wiscasset on \$1,000 bail, and is scheduled to appear in West Bath District Court on March 8.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence and would like to talk with an advocate, call 866-834-4357, TRS 800-787-3224. This free, confidential service is available 24/7 and is accessible from anywhere in Maine.

The age of the victim was not disclosed.

Crandall was arrested after detectives were able to obtain leads and conduct a polygraph examination. He is charged with sexual abuse of a minor, a Class C crime.

Crandall's bail was set at \$1,000 cash.

## Man from Strong charged with abuse

BY RYAN MCLAUGHLIN  
BDN STAFF

STRONG — A local man has been arrested in connection with the alleged sexual

abuse of a minor, Franklin County Sheriff Scott Nichols said.

Michael Crandall, 54, was arrested Thursday following a joint investigation by Detective Ken Charles and the Department of Health and Human Services, Nichols said.



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