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## BULLETIN

# Mickey Rooney Claims Elder Abuse

Actor's testimony to Congress helps spur bill for new crackdown

by: Carole Fleck and Talia Schmidt | from: [AARP Bulletin](#) | March 2, 2011

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Mickey Rooney testifies before the Senate Special Committee on Aging. — *Charlie Archambault*

[En español](#) | Actor Mickey Rooney's dramatic March 2 testimony as a victim of [elder abuse](#) helped dramatize an underreported crime that costs millions of older Americans nearly \$3 billion a year and prompted Washington lawmakers to escalate efforts to focus federal and state prosecutors' attention on the crime.

A veteran of more than 300 film roles, the 90-year-old Rooney took the congressional spotlight, telling a U.S. Senate committee investigating abuse that he had been financially exploited and "stripped of the ability to make even the most basic decisions about my life." His daily life, he said, became "unbearable."

Senate Aging Committee Chairman Herb Kohl (D-Wis.) told Rooney that he would file legislation to create an Office of Elder Justice in the U.S. Department of Justice and seek up to \$20 million to strengthen local law enforcement and protection efforts.

Kohl's committee also heard testimony that the severe financial pressure on state governments was curtailing their ability to protect the elderly at a time when the nation's older population is growing.

The star of the week was Rooney, who in February

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sought court protection from his stepson Chris Aber and Aber's wife, Christina, accusing them of withholding basic necessities such as food and medicine while draining him financially.

A judge at Los Angeles Superior Court appointed a temporary conservator for Rooney's affairs and ordered the couple to stay away from him. Chris Aber is the son of Jan Chamberlin, Rooney's wife of 32 years, and through his lawyer he denied the allegations to ABC News.

For years, Rooney told the Senate Special Committee on Aging, he was afraid to seek help because he was "overwhelmed" with fear, anger and disbelief.

"Sometimes the transition from being in control of your life to having absolutely no control is swift, but other times it is so gradual that you wonder exactly when it truly began," he said.

"Over the course of time, my daily life became unbearable. ... I felt trapped, scared, used and frustrated. But above all, I felt helpless," the testimony read. "For years I suffered silently, unable to muster the courage to seek the help I knew I needed."

Rooney said fighting abuse is complicated because you are not just dealing with your own fears but you are also dealing with family relationships. "Because of your love for other family members, you might feel hesitant to come forward," he said.

Rooney's conservator, Michael Augustine, told the *AARP Bulletin* that the actor is "completely competent." Elder abuse can happen even to people with sharp minds and good health, he said.

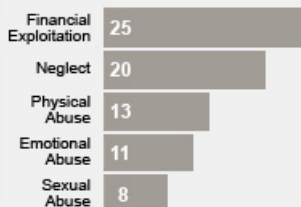
Millions may suffer

Rooney's testimony comes as the Senate Special Committee on Aging examines the prevalence of elder abuse in America. The [American Psychological Association](#) estimates that more than 2 million older adults suffer from physical, financial or other forms of abuse, often at the hands of family members. However, authorities say the actual figure is likely to be much higher, since many incidents go unreported.

Mark Lachs, M.D., director of geriatrics for the NewYork-Presbyterian

## Elder Abuse 2010

Number of States Reporting Increase in Calls



Source: AARP Public Policy Institute



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Healthcare System, interviewed 4,000 older adults in the most extensive study to date on elder abuse and mistreatment in New York. For every case that's reported, he said, some two dozen go undetected.

In his testimony before the committee, Lachs said he plans to urge lawmakers to provide funding to states to develop elder abuse centers in which physicians, social workers, law enforcement, financial experts and others would work together to identify victims — and protect them against exploitation. He said two such centers, created recently in New York City, could serve as national models.

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rooney's testimony to congress helps spark em



Mickey Rooney (third from left) and eighth wife Jan Chamberlin with her sons and his stepsons Mark (left) and alleged elder abuser Chris Aber (right), in the 1980s. — Darlene Hammond/Getty Images

### Resources lacking

But funding for assistance and prevention programs remains scarce, despite increasing reports of abuse. Marie-Therese Connolly, director of the Washington, D.C.-based group [Life Long Justice program](#), which advocates for justice on behalf of older adults, told the committee that Congress has yet to appropriate "a single cent to implement the Elder Justice Act enacted in 2010 or the 2006 elder justice amendments to the Older Americans Act."

The situation is not much better in the nation's cash-strapped states, where budget cuts and layoffs loom. According to a report released Wednesday by the Government Accountability Office, "[Elder Justice: Stronger Federal Leadership Could Enhance National Response to Elder Abuse](#)," state Adult Protective Services (APS) programs around the country face growing caseloads, dwindling resources and inadequate funding.

The report said federal leadership was lacking in efforts to provide state agencies with information on effective solutions, legal and otherwise, to resolve abuse cases. It called collaboration between APS officials, law enforcement officials, prosecutors and financial institutions inadequate.

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AARP's Public Policy Institute has just released a separate report looking at states' ability to manage increased demand for Adult Protective Services. It found that financial exploitation was behind increased calls to APS in 24 states and the District of Columbia last year. But the growing reports of abuse did not result in added funding. Most of those states either maintained or decreased spending for the programs, PPI found.

Because of the lack of federal funding, Adult Protective Services relies mostly on state and local resources, said Kathleen Quinn, executive director of the National Adult Protective Services Association.

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cases are extremely complex and involve issues of capacity, competency, financial instruments and complicated medical issues.

"Very few prosecutors' offices can pay for financial analysts, medical consultants and other similar services," Ulrey told the *Bulletin*, "and these cases often cannot be handled without them."

Rooney made his first cinematic appearance in 1926 as a child actor in the silent film *Not to Be Trusted*. He was later signed by the MGM studio and became one of Hollywood's biggest box-office draws in such films as *Boys Town* and *Babes in Arms*. In 1979, he revived his career with a stage production of *Sugar Babies*.



Mickey Rooney in 1944. — Bettmann/Corbis

The now-white-haired actor, wearing an olive business suit, garnered applause when he entered the Senate hearing room. Reading his testimony, sometimes putting his head in his hands, he said he felt fortunate for the support of his family, friends and fans after his ordeal.

"To those seniors and especially elderly veterans like myself, I want to tell you this: You are not alone and you having nothing to be ashamed of. If elder abuse happened to me, it can happen to anyone," Rooney said. "I want you to know that you deserve better."

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### Physical

- Suspicious bruises or other injuries.
- Sudden change in behavior. (Person is extremely upset, withdrawn, unresponsive.)

### Where to turn for help:

- The elder care locator (1-800-677-1116), for a referral to a local agency that can help.
- Your local Adult Protective Services, the government agency responsible for investigating cases, intervening and providing help.

*Carole Fleck is a senior editor at the AARP Bulletin. Talia Schmidt is a Bulletin intern.*

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**rjsteelers77**

4:46 PM ON MAY 12, 2011

I feel abused by a government system that continues to nickel and dime my social security disability benefits while promising publicly not to do so. I have just stopped the department of education from filching \$176.00 per mo. from my social security disability checks through a program I was originally told didn't exist. Moreover, they are still holding money that the law says they owe me. Although, they have stated they will return the over payment it has been weeks since I've received any response. Why can they take money with such swiftness and it takes forever to return it without interest on the on my dollars? No sooner than they stopped taking education money paid at 30% interest plus penalties, now medicare part B wants \$115.00 per mo. up from \$98.00 per mo., for those already receiving this benefit. Another bad point, regarding this system with SSD is they have a waiting period of two years before you receive medicare benefits after you are determined disabled, talk about abuse please!!!!

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**luisfer**

3:04 PM ON MAY 7, 2011

MICKEY,  
IF YOU NEED HELP IM WILLING TO HELP YOU,DONT ALLOW ANYBODY TO DISRESPECT YOU. NO MATTER IF YOU ARE AN ELDER... THATS WHATS WRONG WITH OUR COUNTRY OUR MORALS ARE FALLING AND THE RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER IS WASTING AWAY!! AMERICA BETTER CHECK ITSELF BEFORE WE GET SUCKED AWAY!!!!

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**pring9**

8:25 PM ON MAY 6, 2011

I was very surprised to hear about -Mickey Rooney and his troubles he was so well known you would think the family would be very diligent in the care they gave him and not treat him like some kind of fool. There is so much mistreatment of the elderly, physical and mental it should be a crime either way and the elderly as well as anyone who needs extra care should be treated with respect at all times. It is good to bring all the caretaking of the elderly or the

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infirm to light and anyone not doing the right thing should be punished, maybe a little jail time would refresh their outlook on caregiving.



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