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Middlesex County District Attorney Marian Ryan Hosts Presentation for Seniors on Opioids

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Contact: Press Office
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Pictured: Bruce Apotheker, Lieutenant, Newton Police Department; Maureen Grannan, Executive Director, Newton at Home; Marian Ryan, Middlesex County District Attorney; Joe Carella, Executive Director, Scandinavian Living Center

NEWTON – Middlesex County District Attorney Marian Ryan spoke to Newton seniors today as part of a new initiative to raise awareness about the risks and impacts of the opioid crisis for seniors. The event was hosted in partnership with Newton at Home and the Scandinavian Living Center. The presentation was part of the District Attorney's new grandparent opioid program, which will educate seniors in Middlesex County about how to manage their prescription medication, keep medication safe from theft, properly dispose of unused or expired medication and identify signs of drug addiction in loved ones. Seniors were also given resources about programs that provide support, guidance and coaching for individuals and family members dealing with addiction.

"We have seen an unfortunate increase in cases where seniors are being targeted and manipulated either to gain access to opioids or as a source of money for loved ones with a substance use disorder," said District Attorney Ryan. "By raising awareness we are taking another step to curb this problem while working to safeguard the physical and emotional health of our seniors."

District Attorney Ryan, who previously chaired the Middlesex District Attorney's Office's Elder Protection Unit, has developed this new program recognizing that the impact of the opioid crisis on seniors is extensive.

Approximately 34,000 grandparents in Massachusetts are raising grandchildren. According to a survey conducted by the Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Children, 80 percent of these cases are because of opioid use or the opioid-related death of a son or daughter. Additionally, seniors often have opioids at home, either from a prior surgery or as an active prescription for chronic pain. They can also

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be financially vulnerable and susceptible to pressure from family members who may approach them for money when they know they regularly receive checks.

The grandparent program provides an essential understanding of opioids, educating seniors on the origin of the problem and focusing on issues including overprescribing and prescription drug use as a gateway to heroin. The presentation also helps seniors to identify signs of a substance use disorder of which they may be otherwise unaware. Some signs seniors learned to watch for include missing items like spoons, aluminum foil, plastic sandwich bags and valuables like money and jewelry. Seniors also learned how to recognize physical, social and emotional manifestations of substance use.

At the conclusion of the presentation, District Attorney Ryan provided attending seniors with a "File of Life." This personalized card can be used to maintain a list of an individual's medications, the dosages, and frequency, and lists important information about medical data and emergency contacts. This card can be a helpful tool for first responders when administering emergency care and also to help identify missing medication in cases of suspected elder abuse.

Addiction is a disease experienced by the entire family and children and seniors are the most vulnerable secondary victims of the opioid crisis. In addition to the grandparent program, District Attorney Ryan also recently launched Project C.A.R.E., an unprecedented partnership between the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, the Lowell Police Department and the Mental Health Association of Greater Lowell to provide a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week rapid response intervention program for children who witness a parent or loved one suffer an overdose.

Today's training was the first in this county-wide initiative to provide information and resources to Middlesex Seniors. Middlesex County has experienced a 185% increase in overdose deaths since 2012. Last year in Newton there were three fatal overdoses, this year there have already been two fatal overdoses.

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