

## How many more people will die before you act?

*Two sisters with mental retardation, Debbie and Susan lived in the basement of the home of their third sister. Children's services were in and out of the home and removed the third sister's five children. On the rare occasions anyone was allowed inside the home Debbie and Susan were found unbathed, wearing dirty clothes, sleeping on filthy linens that smelled like urine and feces. Neither Susan nor Debbie had been to see a doctor or dentist while in their sister's care. Debbie was eventually kicked out of her day program because she began stealing food from other participants because she was hungry. Other family members tried to get the Department of Human Services involved but there was no help available. Case management and county officials, although aware of the situation, had no authority to go into the house and remove the women. On December 9, family members got a phone call from the sister asking for someone to come and pick up Debbie. When they arrived they were told that Susan was dead. Her body had been found in her basement while they were in the process of moving. No one was sure how long she had been dead. Debbie's aunt took her in. Susan was buried on Christmas Eve.*

**If Debbie and Susan were under 18 or over 60, they could have received help. Because they weren't, there was no help.**

**If Pennsylvania had an adult protective services system, Susan might still be alive and Debbie might have been spared the horrors she endured.**

*A woman told people at her day program, that her father was sexually abusing her. Her father found out about her accusations and removed her from the program that reported the abuse and there was nothing we could do. She became his prey 24 hours a day.*

**There is legislation which could help—SB 1049 and HB 361. Last session a similar bill passed the House and died in the Senate. PA is one of only six states that fails to protect vulnerable people between 18 and 59.**

*A 19 year old woman with mental retardation lives with her family in a run-down house with garbage on the front lawn and no screens on the open windows. According to neighbors, their utilities are consistently turned off and on due to lack of payment. She never seems to be dressed in warm clothes during the winter months. Her teachers reported that she often came to school in dirty clothes, with no lunch to eat and having eaten no breakfast. She was often bruised. She will sometimes be seen walking around her house; but neighbors have said that when they spoke to her, she seemed very afraid to speak with them. Neighbors report that family members are in and out of jail or prison and that there have been times, days on end, when they did not see a car in the driveway, which left them to wonder if she might be home alone. No one has the authority to go into the home and get her out.*

**These are a handful of the many stories of people in trouble across the Commonwealth. Real people—your constituents.**

### **YOU CAN PROTECT THEM:**

- **Act now to include start up funds for adult protective services in the 2008-09 budget.**
- **Then pass SB 1049, HB 361 or similar legislation.**

**DON'T LET ANYONE ELSE DIE OR BE INJURED ON YOUR WATCH.**

For more information, including a list of supporting organizations, contact the Adult Protective Services Coalition, care of Judy Banks, Disability Rights Network, 717 236 8110, extension 305.