

Families get cameras to spot abuse at care homes

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Families with elderly relatives in care homes can secretly monitor whether they are being abused by workers under legislation introduced in Wisconsin.

Anyone who believes that their loved one is being mistreated will be able to request a camera and memory card from police for 30 days to record suspected culprits.

The programme is part of a larger state initiative to protect the elderly amid fears that more are being neglected and mistreated as the care home population rises.

Cases are often difficult to prosecute because the victims are infirm or not of sound mind and make poor witnesses. Those behind the new law say that film footage will offer better evidence to trap the guilty.

Wisconsin introduced the camera proposal after the number of reports of elderly people being abused in the state doubled to 8,000 a year in the past decade.

It also follows a pilot scheme tested in New Jersey in 2016 which was expanded last year after several successful prosecutions. One in four nursing facilities in the US does not meet federal standards.

As many as five million Americans aged 60 and above — or one in ten — are said to suffer from some form of abuse every year at the hands of carers, according to estimates from the National Council on Ageing.

Announcing the project, Brad Schimel, the Wisconsin attorney-general, said: "There's nothing worse than feeling helpless when a loved one is being taken advantage of."

"These cameras will either give peace of mind to a patient's family or provide needed evidence to allow law enforcement and public health to immediately intervene and protect the abused patient."

At present six US states allow video monitoring in nursing homes but in others privacy laws prohibit filming. Some jurisdictions have requirements for consent or ban monitoring in certain settings.

There is a campaign in Britain to allow the installation of cameras in homes, although it has become a vexed issue, with nursing groups complaining about being put "under the microscope".

Dominic Grieve, the former attorney-general, said: "Requiring the public parts of care homes to be monitored by CCTV would contribute to reducing the possibility of abuse and make detection easier where it has occurred."

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