

# **North Carolina**

## **Senior Tar Heel Legislature**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chapel Hill—The North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature (NCSTHL) held their last meeting of 2016 on October 4 and 5. The focus, as it is every even numbered year, was the establishment of new priorities. The priorities that are selected are the primary method of conveying to the North Carolina General Assembly and other advocacy groups that the NCSTHL, representing all 100-counties in North Carolina, are unified as a single voice on aging issues.

In an ongoing effort to keep all members of the NCSTHL informed and educated on aging issues, the Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) provided several knowledgeable speakers. Mary Edwards, Consumer Affairs Program Manager, provided some background and status on the Home and Community Care Block Grant, more often referred to as the HCCBG. The Home and Community Care Block Grant allows for the provision of a broad range of services designed to improve the quality of life for older adults. However, Edwards acknowledged, “that there are waiting lists in North Carolina for those services. For example, there are currently 9,962 people waiting for HCCBG services.” She also spoke to the issues regarding senior malnutrition stating, “NC is rated as number eight for high senior malnutrition among all the states in the United States.” She went to say, “17.98% of the seniors in NC are threatened by hunger due to poverty and lack of transportation or lack of access to nutritious food. Currently, there are 3,139 people on the waiting list for home delivered meals, another service provided for by the HCCBG.” The HCCBG is a much-needed service and one that the NCSTHL always identifies as a critical priority that deserves their support and advocacy efforts before the NC General Assembly.

Kathryn Lanier, Chief, Elder Rights Section of DAAS, gave a presentation on the Ombudsman Program for Long Term Care Facilities in NC. She gave a brief history on the program and its organizational structure. Lanier spoke at length on the services and rights that a person has once accepted into a Long Term Care facility. The primary objective is to allow the person under care to be allowed to make as many decisions as they are capable of and to insure that procedures and policy by the LTC facility are being adhered to.

Next to speak was Carmelita Karhoff, Ombudsman, Triangle J region. Her presentation was entitled “Enhancing Dementia Care Through Personalized Music.” Personalized music is a simple yet effective program to bring specific music to individuals living with dementia. The result in many cases results in a happier and more social person and a person whose relationship with staff, residents, and family deepen. More information can be obtained by visiting the following website: <http://musicandmemory.org>

The second day of meetings opened with an informative presentation by Alicia Blater, Family Caregiver Support Program Consultant. All 16-Area Agencies on Aging in North Carolina have a dedicated Family Caregiver Support person on staff to answer questions about services available and to give assistance to caregivers in gaining access to the services. Individual counseling, support groups and training to assist caregivers in the areas of health, nutrition and financial literacy is available. One extremely valuable service is respite care. This service enables caregivers to be temporarily relieved from their caregiving responsibilities. One in five people in NC are caring for someone with special needs and respite care is essential for the health of the caregiver. For more information, contact your local Area Agency on Aging.

Vance Braxton, Director/Deputy Commissioner, NC Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) spoke on the status of SHIIP and the upcoming Medicare enrollment period. Open enrollment period this year is from October 15<sup>th</sup> through December 7<sup>th</sup>. This is the time to look at different Medicare programs, such as, Medicare Part D (prescription drugs) and decide what's best for you based on your needs. "About 70% of the people we talk to save money by changing plans based on their needs and drugs. You need to know if the plan you have or are looking at covers your particular drugs." Braxton said. "The time to find out that your drug is not covered is not when you go to the pharmacy and you're told that your meds cost \$80.00 because they're not covered by your plan." Braxton briefly addressed the federal budget, "the US Senate this year cut funding for SHIIP nationwide 52-million dollars. However, the House put full funding back in place. We're in an election season, what normally happens is the US House, and Senate come together and compromise. I want to thank all of you for your letters, calls and emails to your legislator's in support of SHIIP. Last year during our grant period, we and volunteers across NC saved NC residents 53-million dollars. The total federal budget for SHIIP across the United States is 52-million dollars. Across NC we saved consumers more than the whole federal budget." Braxton closed with one more bit of information in regards to personal privacy, "in 2018 new Medicare cards will be issued without Social Security numbers listed." For more information or to contact a SHIIP representative call: 1-855-408-1212.

The newly voted on NCSTHL priorities for 2016-2017 are:

- 1.) Re-establish the Study Commission on Aging. The NCSTHL requests the North Carolina General Assembly re-establish the North Carolina Study Commission on Aging.
- 2.) Increase Home and Community Care Block Grant Funding The NCSTHL requests the General Assembly increase the Home and Community Care Block Grant funding by \$7 million dollars in recurring funds.
- 3.) Increase Funding for Senior Centers. NCSTHL recommends that the General Assembly increase funding for the Senior Centers to continue to meet the vital needs of North Carolina's growing population of older adults.
- 4.) Sustain and Expand Project C.A.R.E. NCSTHL recommends that the General Assembly increase recurring funding for Project C.A.R.E. in 2017-2018 by ten percent annually and thereafter to meet the expected growth, statewide.
- 5.) Strengthen and Fund North Carolina's Adult Protective Services Program (APS). NCSTHL recommends that the North Carolina General Assembly recognize and value its vulnerable and older citizens by making available \$5 million in recurring funds in the State budget to meet the growing need for APS in North Carolina. A more detailed explanation of these priorities will be available on the NCSTHL website.

The NCSTHL promotes citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues before the NC General Assembly and assesses the legislative needs of older adults by convening a forum modeled after the North Carolina General Assembly. Please feel free to contact your local representative or the local Area Agency on Aging for additional information. You can also visit the STHL website at <http://www.ncsthl.org> as well as our Facebook page, search for North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature. The next NCSTHL meeting will take place in Chapel Hill, NC on March 14-15, 2017.