

North Carolina



Senior Tar Heel Legislature

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
By: John Thompson

March 19, 2015

Raleigh– The Senior Tar Heel Legislature held their first meeting of the year on Monday March 16th in Raleigh. The opening speaker Suzanne Merrill, Director of Aging and Adult Services, gave a brief description of and the Divisions 2015-2019 State Aging Plan and the Governor’s budget, as it relates to the Division, which came out on March 6th. “The budget included 7.8 billion dollars for Medicaid through years 2015-2017 and will provide Medicaid, as we know it now, to 1.8 million citizens in North Carolina, that’s families, children, older adults, and adults with disabilities.” Merrill went on to say, “The budget also includes expansion of services for individuals with mental illness, intellectual disabilities, and substance abuse. Also, the budget preserved funding for community based programs for older adults, such as, Home and Community Care Block Grant, senior center general purpose fund and Project CARE.” The budget is now under legislative review and passage of the final state budget.

Director Merrill introduced Mark Hensley, Project CARE Director, for the Division of Aging and Adult Services. Hensley presented a short presentation on the 2015 White House Conference on Aging. Hensley stated that retirement security is a vitally important issue. “More senior citizens are staying in the workforce longer, because they have to.” He went on to say, “Long-Term Services and support remain a priority and less than 3% on North Carolina citizens have Long-Term Care Insurance.” Hensley wrapped up talking about Elder Abuse. “Given that seniors, particularly the oldest older Americans, can be vulnerable to financial exploitation, abuse, and neglect, Elder Justice is very important. The Elder Justice Act was enacted as part of the affordable Care Act, and we need to realize its vision of protecting seniors from scam artist and others seeking to take advantage of them.”

Two other notable guest speakers from the Division of Aging and Adult Services were Reena Shetty, Senior Community Services Employment Program Coordinator and Leslee Breen, Senior Center Development Specialist. Shetty gave an extensive and comprehensive overview of the Older Americans Act, going into detail on the organizational structure, definitions, and explanation of the different titles and the role of the 16- Area Agencies on Aging in North Carolina.

Senior Center Certification and the role of senior centers within the community were the main topics presented by Leslee Breen. The senior center certification program was devised to insure consistent quality, performance, and accountability across all senior centers statewide. Currently, there are 163 senior centers in North Carolina and over one-half are certified. Senior centers provide low cost, high quality programs to allow seniors to remain active and most important, provide socialization.

The second day of the conference was notable with a much deserved award ceremony and a scheduled trip to the North Carolina General Assembly. A plaque from the STHL expressing appreciation for service and support of the STHL was awarded to Mr. Dennis Streets, the former Director of the Division of Aging and Adult Services during the period of 2006 through 2014. The plaque read in part, “Your guidance and counsel has served as an inspiration to all who know you.”

Following the awards ceremony, the STHL went in mass to the General Assembly to meet with representatives and senators of their respective counties to ask for their support on one or all of the STHL 2015 Legislative Priorities, while working on passage of the state budget. The STHL priorities and recommendations are listed below.

1. Preserve or Restore Optional Medicaid Services: the STHL is asking that the General Assembly make no changes in the Optional Medicaid services North Carolina now provides to its citizens.
2. Maintain Funding for Senior Centers: The STHL recommends that the North Carolina General Assembly maintain current Senior Center General Purpose funding to continue meeting the needs of our growing population of older adults.
3. Strengthen and Fund North Carolina’s Adult Protective Services Program: STHL recommends that the North Carolina General Assembly recognize and value its vulnerable and older citizens budget by making available \$5 million in the State budget to meet the growing need for Adult Protective Services in North Carolina.
4. Notify Medicare Patients Admitted for Observation: We urge the North Carolina General Assembly to pass legislation requiring all North Carolina hospitals and other health care facilities that accept patients for overnight stays to formally notify such persons orally and in writing at the time of their status as “Inpatient” or “Observation.”
5. Home and Community Care Block Grant Funding: STHL requests the General Assembly to restore the \$969,549.00 in cuts from state fiscal year 2013-2014 HCCBG funding and increase its annual funding by the percentage increase equal to the 65 plus population growth of North Carolina.

The STHL promotes citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues before the 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 delegate or your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). 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 STHL meeting will be June 9-10, 2015.