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General Legislative and Health Issues Committees Submit Resolutions for the NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature

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This article is the fourth of six features describing the current focus of the NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature leading up to the 2023 legislative session of the NC General Assembly.

For those who are following this series of features describing the current work of the NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature (NCSTHL), we are highlighting the six issues committees as they determine which proposals are most important and timely for legislative consideration by the NC General Assembly in 2023. Two issues committees are combined for this article, the General Legislative and the Health Issues Committees.

The General Legislative Issues Committee, chaired by Kaye White (Dare County), addresses proposals that don't readily fall into the other five issues categories. Topics may include livable communities, employment skills, financial education, veterans services, and grant funding for supportive services. One of the longest-standing requests is for the NC General Assembly to appropriate recurring funds for the Home & Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG). The services provided by the HCCBG include adult day care, home-delivered meals, transportation, senior center operations, in-home aide, and caregiver respite, among many others. With a wait list of nearly 11,000 older adults, the committee proposed an increase of \$8 million in recurring funds for the HCCBG budget, in addition to the amount for the HCCBG grant, which is matched by federal funds authorized through the Older Americans Act (1965) and administered by the state's 16 area agency on aging offices.

Research has shown that providing supportive services that enable older adults to age in their home costs far less than placement in institutional settings such as assisted living or nursing homes. According to the NC DAAS State Expenditures Report, for fiscal year 2021, the average expense per person for home-delivered meals was \$841; in-home aide for personal care services was \$4,318; and adult day care with nursing supervision cost \$4,075. In comparison, Medicaid nursing home expenses were \$27,846 per person for the year. While many affluent retirees may not ever require the services provided through HCCBG programs, there are many who are one medical emergency away from needing help. The typical HCCBG recipient is a 78-year-old widow living alone who has two or more impaired activities of daily living. A cancer diagnosis, a broken hip from a fall, the death of a spouse caregiver, or the accumulation of multiple health issues can suddenly disrupt the life of an older adult who has been living independently.

The General Legislative Issues Committee also proposed the enactment of an automobile insurance discount for adults age 55 and older who successfully complete a driver safety class.

The Health Issues Committee identifies remedies to practices and policies that challenge the physical and mental well-being of older adults. Of chief concern is the need to establish incentives to attract and retain healthcare practitioners who will choose aging-related fields and work in North Carolina. The committee proposed the

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allocation of \$5 million to provide scholarships and incentives that build the corps of medical specialists and motivates them to stay in the state to practice medicine.

The second proposal is to continue recurring funding of \$225,000 for an online portal hosted by Trualta that has proven to be of great benefit to family caregivers, who are often home-bound and unable to attend support groups.

As much as 80% of a person's health is affected by the quality of their community's social determinants of health and the person's ability to access basic resources. These proposals to be submitted for vote by the NCSTHL in October will work in concert with existing programs to expand their reach to older adults who are underserved and unable to thrive in their golden years.

About the NCSTHL: The North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature was created as a nonpartisan, unicameral body by the North Carolina General Assembly with the passage of Senate Bill 479 in July of 1993. Its purpose is to identify the most pressing issues facing older adults across the state and propose new legislation that will improve their quality of life to the NC General Assembly. The NCSTHL is comprised of delegates and alternates representing each of North Carolina's 100 counties, supported by the area agencies on aging serving the state's sixteen service areas.

For more information about NCSTHL, visit www.ncseniortarheellegislature.org.

To contact your local NCSTHL member, send an email request to media contact Allison Brown at ncsthlpr@gmail.com, stating the originating county. Or visit the North Carolina Association of Area Agencies on Aging (NC4A) to locate the correct region and county, at <https://www.nc4a.org/membership>, and request NCSTHL member contact information from the local Area Agency on Aging.

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