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NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature Announces Five Legislative Priorities for 2023-24

October 5, 2022 – Raleigh, NC

Woody Brinson (Duplin County), Chair of the Resolutions Standing Committee, announced the results of voting by the NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature (NCSTHL) to determine the five legislative priorities it will promote to the NC General Assembly for the 2023-24 lawmaking cycle. The announcement was made Tuesday, October 4, as a result of Monday afternoon's vote.

The top-ranking recommendation is for the state to provide \$8 million in recurring funds for county Adult Protective Services (APS) programs, to cover current staff shortages and future staff needs. In NC, the federal Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds 21% of the programs, the counties fund the remaining 79%, and the state provides no funding. With the growth in the older adult population, county departments of social services APS units are overwhelmed by increased demand in reports of the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older, disabled, and vulnerable adults.

Second in priority is the recommendation to increase recurring funding for the state's 169 senior centers to \$2.5 million, providing each center \$5000 to cover administrative costs and allocating the remaining \$2 million based on the existing merit-based system. Since 2004, funding for senior centers has remained at \$1,265,316 per year, with a one-time non-recurring increase in FY 07-08 of \$200,000. The age 60+ population has nearly doubled from 1.3 million in 2000 to 2.4 million in 2020.

The recommendation to increase recurring state funding by \$8 million for the state's Home & Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) is the third priority. Approximately 11,000 residents age 60 and older are currently waitlisted for services that support malnourished, homebound, dependent, and economically needy older adults. These supports help them continue to live at home and prevent more costly interventions.

The fourth priority is the recommendation to increase the number of regional long-term care ombudsmen by appropriating \$1.5 million to add 11 full-time staff, bringing NC up to industry standards. Ombudsmen serve as advocates for residents in assisted living facilities and nursing homes, providing critical protections for the vulnerable population living in long-term care settings.

The fifth priority is a policy recommendation to enact minimum standards of staff-to-patient ratios in long-term care facilities for personnel providing direct patient care, such as certified nursing assistants. In NC, minimal staffing standards exist for RNs and LPNs in long-term care settings, but there are no state requirements that establish how many residents may be assigned to the care of an aide, often resulting in neglect of frail older adults and overwork of their primary caregivers.

The budget for state's Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) is \$174 million for 2022. The fiscal impact of these recommendations would add \$20 million to the DAAS budget, for a total of \$194 million in 2023-24. Consider these facts: adults age 60+ comprise 24% of the total NC population; the DAAS budget represents 0.26% of the total state budget of \$66 billion. The NCSTHL recommends that the state appropriate funds in keeping with the growth of the older adult population to provide the protections and support that enable them to live with dignity and as much independence as possible.

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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 Agency 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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