

North Carolina



Senior Tar Heel Legislature

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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A Silver Lining during the North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature Meeting

NCSTHL Priority Finally Ratified

Raleigh, NC – The North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature (NCSTHL) heard from state leaders during the final meeting for 2013. In addition, the group also chose a new resolution to add to its current four that are sent to the North Carolina General Assembly for consideration. The group also elected new executive officers and celebrated the outgoing Speaker.

The final report for the year came from Dennis Streets, Director of the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS). Mr. Streets offered encouraging words to the group and thanked everyone for their service stating “the difference that you have made since 1992 is immeasurable.” He also explained how the federal government “shutdown” will impact DAAS. “This reaches down into each of our communities,” explained Streets, “many of our services are dependent on federal funds, and the hard part is to decide what will be affected.” Streets stated that he is working to keep advocates as well as service providers posted on current and correct information as he receives it.

There was a silver lining during Mr. Streets’ update. A NCSTHL priority, Drug Testing for Long-Term Care Applicants and Employees – Senate Bill 542, has been signed into law. This has been a priority for the Senior Tar Heels for several years. The act will require long-term care facilities to require applicants for employment and certain employees to submit to drug testing for controlled substances. The resolutions committee chose *Ratio of Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) to Resident’s in Nursing Homes* to complete its five priorities. This new priority focuses on quality of care in nursing homes. Studies show that facilities with a higher CNA staffing ratio have fewer health care deficiencies, lower hospitalization rates, and fewer government cited deficiencies. The health and safety of resident’s are compromised when the facility is understaffed. Residents are at a higher risk of receiving poor care and being victims of abuse when the staff is unable to respond adequately to patient needs. The NCSTHL urges the NC General Assembly to mandate an increase in the standardized hours per patient daily (HPPD) thereby requiring a higher CNA staffing ratio be established to ensure a better quality of care for residents in nursing homes.

Jessica Keith, Special Advisor on Americans with Disabilities Act, spoke about the Transitions for Community Living Initiative. This initiative is the result of the State of North Carolina entering into an agreement with the United States Department of Justice in August 2012. The agreement is aimed to guarantee that individuals with mental illness are allowed to live in their communities of choice. Individuals living in adult care homes or institutions can receive resources and services that empower them to live in a community based setting. These services include housing assistance and employment opportunities. So far, more than 130 people have transitioned out of facilities and into housing.

Elections were held during the last day of the meeting and new officers were sworn in for their two-year tenure. The incoming executive officers are: Speaker, Chuck Youse, North Hampton County; Speaker Pro-Tempore, Dr. Althea Taylor-Jones, Forsyth County; Deputy Speaker, Pro-Tempore Marge Zima, Onslow County; and Secretary, George Smith, Johnston County. Speaker Youse stated that “the challenges we face will be many but, working together, I am confident that we will continue to be the pre-eminent voice of hope for our senior citizens.”

Outgoing Speaker, John Thompson, expressed his appreciation to the group saying “it has been my honor and privilege to have served as Speaker for the Senior Tar Heel Legislature, during the last two years. As I pass on the reins of leadership, I take comfort in knowing that Speaker Chuck Youse will continue to move our great organization forward as he takes on the challenges of the next two years.”

The Senior Tar Heels participated in their 5th Annual Food Drive. In years past, the donated items were distributed to local food pantries. The donated items will go to the local food bank. This year's food drive was the largest and most successful to date!

The 2013 legislative priorities for the STHL include: 1) Maintain funding for senior centers; 2) Restore funding to sustain Project C.A.R.E.; 3) Strengthen and fund North Carolina's Adult Protective Services Program; 4) Recurring funds of at least \$7 million for the Home and Community Care Block Grant; and 5) Ratio of Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) to Resident's in Nursing Homes.

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. It is during these forums that the STHL establish priorities for the upcoming years. One delegate and one alternate represent every older adult in the state's 100-counties. Please feel free to contact your local representative. Also visit the STHL website at <http://www.ncsth.org/> or [like us on Facebook](#), search for North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature. The next STHL meeting will be March 20 – 21, 2014.