

North Carolina

Senior Tar Heel Legislature

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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By: John Thompson

Chapel Hill—The North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature (NCSTHL) held their first meeting of 2016 on March 17-18. The focus of the meeting was to bring new information forward regarding issues that affect our senior's statewide.

Suzanne Merrill, Director of the Division of Aging and Adult Services, provided an update from the latest legislative session. She was delighted to report that one of the NCSTHL priorities, the restoration of funding for the Home and Community Care Block Grant, \$969,549.00, was restored, however, this is on a non-recurring basis. Director Merrill went on to speak on several recent developments, some of the most notable being the unveiling of the state “Strategic Plan for Addressing Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias.” The plan in its entirety can be viewed at the following web site: <http://www.nciom.org/publications/>.

“The State Plan recommendations address the NCSTHL 2016 legislative priorities. These include for the expansion of the home and community based services, assuring an adequate system of protection by examining the Adult Protective Services and Guardianship statues.” It goes on to address “the adequacy of the work force to provide the system of protection and the passage of the Uniform Adult Guardianship and Protective Proceedings Act by the NC General Assembly.” The State Plan will be available in a published NC Institute of Medicine Report in early April.

Merrill also briefly addressed Medicaid Reform legislation, noting Session Law 2015-245, which is an Act to Transform and Reorganize NC’s Medicaid and Health Choice Programs into a Managed Care Service Delivery System. A total of 12 public hearings are scheduled across the state between March 30 and April 18. The public will be able to hear and learn more about NC’s plans for Medicaid Reform and offer feedback at these sessions. For more information on sites and dates for public hearings go to the following web site: <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/nc-medicaid-reform/public-hearings>.

Other notable speakers included Van Braxton, Deputy Commissioner, Senior’s Health Insurance Information Program, who gave a brief update on health insurance options for seniors.

Charmaine Fuller-Cooper, AARP-NC, Associate State Director-Advocacy, talked about the “needs of AARP’s 1.1 million North Carolina members and AARP’s continued work to improve the financial, and health security of all North Carolinians.” She went on to describe the 2015 AARP Financial and Health bills as well as state budget line items that are supported and those that are opposed by the organization.

Dr. James Johnson, Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, UNC Chapel Hill kept everyone laughing with his anecdotal descriptions as he talked about the “Global Aging and the Graying of America.” Dr. Johnson has had related articles published in the Washington Post, Business Week and has appeared on the Today Show and CNN Headline News. “We are in an unprecedented demographic transition and we’re bracing for the Silver Tsunami,” Dr. Johnson said.

He went on to say, “in 2005 we had a ratio of 3 to 1, that is, three children to one senior. In 2050, that ratio will be 1 to 1. One of the biggest things confronting businesses in the future will not be childcare, rather elder care. In 1900 the life span was 47 years-old. In 2010 it was 78 years-old. One school of thought is that someone living to be 130 has already been born.”

Living longer can be attributed to “living better, eating better and taking better care of our physical health. Today, a person turning 65 can expect to live another 18.7 years.” Dr. Johnson continued to provide an array of additional statistics mixed with humor that provided a fine balance of entertainment and information.

The next NCSTHL meeting will take place in Chapel Hill on June 7-8 where the process for establishing new priorities will be in full swing. Currently, the 2015-2016 legislative priorities are: 1) Preserve or Restore Optional Medicaid Services; 2) Sustain and Expand Project C.A.R.E; 3) Strengthen and fund North Carolina’s Adult Protective Services Program; 4) Uniform Adult Guardianship; 5) Home and Community Care Block Grant Funding. 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.