

# Senior Tar Heel Legislature Meets

By John Thompson

The North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature (NCSTHL) held its first meeting of 2016 on March 17-18. The focus of the meeting was to bring new information forward regarding issues that affect our seniors statewide.

Suzanne Merrill, Director of the Division of Aging and Adult Services, provided an update from the latest legislative session. She was pleased to report that one of the NCSTHL priorities, the restoration of funding for the Home and Community Care Block Grant, was restored in the amount of \$969,549. However, it is on a nonrecurring basis. Director Merrill went on to speak on several recent developments, perhaps the most notable being the unveiling of the state Strategic Plan for Addressing Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias. The plan can be viewed in its entirety at [nciom.org/publications/](http://nciom.org/publications/).

Director Merrill reported that "the state plan recommendations address the NCSTHL 2016 legislative priorities. These include measures for the expansion of the home- and community-based services, assuring an adequate system of protection by examining the adult protective services and guardianship statutes," and that the plan goes on to address "the adequacy of the workforce 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 was 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 were held across the state in March and April.

Other notable speakers included Van Braxton, Deputy Commissioner of the Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIPS), who gave a brief update on health insurance options for seniors.

Charmaine Fuller-Cooper, Associate State Director for Advocacy with AARP-NC, 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 at 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* and *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 that "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 but, rather, elder care. In 1900 the life span was 47 years; in 2010 it was 78 years. One school of thought is that someone living to be 130 has already been born."

Dr. Johnson went on to say that 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." He 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 be held 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. (Caregiver Alternative to Running on Empty)
- 3) Strengthen and Fund North Carolina's Adult Protective Services Program
- 4) Adoption of the Uniform Adult Guardianship Protective Proceedings Jurisdiction Act
- 5) Home and Community Care Block Grant Funding

A more detailed explanation of these priorities is available on the NCSTHL website at [ncsthl.org](http://ncsthl.org).

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. Find us on Facebook or visit the NCSTHL website shown above for more information. In addition, please feel free to contact your local Carteret County representative, Victor Heinrich, at 571-4735 or [vheinrich1@gmail.com](mailto:vheinrich1@gmail.com), or Eastern Carolina Council Area Agency on Aging Director Tonya Cedars at 800-824-4648.



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