

# **North Carolina**

## **Senior Tar Heel Legislature**

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By: Victor E. Heinrich

Chapel Hill - The Senior Tar Heel Legislature (STHL) met on October 3 and 4 to elect new Executive Officers, review existing priorities and host several informative speakers as the year concludes.

Outgoing Speaker Dr. Althea Taylor-Jones was honored by the presence of students majoring in Gerontology and enrolled in the Public Policy, Aging and Society class at Winston-Salem State University. Students observed customary proceedings of the general body and attended committee meetings to gain insight into the process used for the development and/or maintenance of resolutions/priorities. Students were accompanied by their instructor Dr. Shannon Mathews, Gerontology Program Director and Chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Work. Dr. Taylor-Jones developed the curriculum for the Public Policy, Aging and Society class when she served as Gerontology Program Director from 2002-2009.

Mary Edwards, MA, Consumer Affairs Program Manager, Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, provided the status of bills affecting seniors. She also provided Health Rankings from the United Health Foundation. Regarding spending on home and community services, North Carolina is ranked 35<sup>th</sup> with \$335 for person for those over 60 in poverty in comparison to the first ranked state spending \$3599. North Carolina is ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in suicides per 100,000 <http://www.AmericasHealthRankings.org>.

Ms Stacey Hurly, No Wrong Door State Coordinator with the Division of Aging and Adult Services reported on the “211” Program. Dial “211” or <http://www.NC211.org> to get free and confidential information on such topics as: food, housing, utility assistance, health care services, counseling, mental health, and substance, abuse services, disaster services, and more. Also known as “No Wrong Door” this is a partnership between the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) and the United Way of North Carolina.

Ms. Gray Fullwood, Special Agent, State Bureau of Investigation, advised about pharmaceutical diversion, the opioid crisis and environmental crimes. Addicts keep seeking drugs so that “they don’t get sick.” She can be reached at 984-204-2722 or [gfullwood@nc.sbi.gov](mailto:gfullwood@nc.sbi.gov).

The final business ended with the Issues Committees meeting to reconsider priorities for 2018. Following all formal business, a reception was held for the outgoing speaker Dr. Althea Taylor-Jones. Attendees included Senior Tar Heel Legislators, Area Agency on Aging staff, and guests.

Day two started with Mr. Van Braxton, Deputy Commissioner of the Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIPP). SHIIP recently held six Town Halls across the state. Open enrollment is Oct 15 – Dec 7. Please process your enrollment, as early is better. Up to 8000 calls a month are expected. In April 2018, the process of issuing new Medicare ID cards with a

new number and no Social Security will begin. When the new card is received, recipients are advised to SHRED their old card. SHIIP may be contacted at 855-408-1212 or <http://www.ncdoi.com/SHIIP>.

A dynamic panel of speakers moderated by Mary Edwards included, Charmaine Fuller-Cooper, Associate State Director, North Carolina AARP, Mary Bethel, Chair, North Carolina Coalition on Aging and Roger Manus, Governor's Advisory Council on Aging. Their encouragement to Senior Tar Heel Legislators, for the advancement of advocacy on behalf of older adults included: 1) Working together collaboratively with other groups on issues; 2) Interacting with our legislators (local, state, and federal), at home in their districts; 3) Getting to know legislative staffers; 4) Keeping our eyes on Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid; 5) Staying or becoming savvy about the need for retirement savings for all generations/life stages; 6) The importance of aging in place; and 7) Supporting more geriatricians.

The final event of our meeting involved the election of new Executive Officers. Executive Officers are elected by majority vote every two years. The Oath of Office for newly elected officers was administered by the outgoing Speaker, Dr. Althea Taylor-Jones. The new Senior Tar Heel Legislature Speaker for the 2018-2019 Term of Office is Rev. J. Dwight Cartner from Davidson County. Speaker Cartner addressed the organization after being sworn in and made a commitment to keeping advocacy and meeting with our elected officials as his top priorities. More details about Speaker Cartner and the other elected Executive Officers can be found at our website, listed below.

Legislative priorities for 2018 were reviewed for possible revisions. Priorities for 2017 were approved by the body for continuation in 2018. Priorities are: 1) Reestablish the Study Commission on Aging; 2) Increase Home and Community Care Block Grant funding; 3) Increase funding for senior centers; 4) Sustain and expand Project CARE (Caregiver Alternative to Running on Empty); and 5) Strengthen and fund North Carolina Adult Protective Services (APS). A more detailed explanation of these priorities is available on our website.

The Senior Tar Heel Legislature 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. Please feel free to contact your local delegate or your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). You can also visit our website at: <http://www.ncsth.org> as well as our Facebook page. The next meeting of the Senior Tar Heel Legislature will be held March 13-14 2018, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.