



Coming Together to Advocate for Older Adults NC Coalition on Aging Updates March 2020 Distributed March 30, 2020

A Message from Tracy Colvard, Chairman of the NC Coalition on Aging Board of Directors



We certainly hope everyone is staying safe and out of harms way until this pandemic will hopefully start subsiding sooner rather than later. The Coalition on Aging is here for you to be a resource and an advocating arm whenever needed. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Allison or any of our board members with any thoughts, ideas and concerns as we navigate these unprecedented times.



A Message From Allison Costanzo, Executive Director

Thank you to everyone who is navigating the ever-changing landscape of life with COVID-19 in North Carolina. To the direct service providers, the government agencies, and everyone in between, thank you for caring for North Carolina, and our senior population. We will continue to provide you with updates as we learn them regarding Coronavirus. If there is any information about your organization you'd like us to share, please let me know. Stay healthy! If you need to contact me, you can email executivedirector@nccoalitiononaging.org

A Note on Joyce Massey-Smith

We received information this morning that Joyce was involved in a bad car accident on Friday evening. She suffered multiple broken bones including her ribs, pelvis and arm, as well as other injuries. She is currently in ICU at Wake Med, but considering the extent of her injuries, is doing well. She had a successful surgery today and will now begin the healing process. Please keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

Membership Dues are Due for 2020

A friendly reminder that Membership Dues are paid on an annual basis and are due for 2020. If you or your organization has not yet paid, please go to <http://www.nccoalitiononaging.org/membership.aspx> to submit your application today.

March Coalition Meeting

The March meeting of 2020 was held on March 27th at 10:00am via a dial-in provided by AARP. Joyce Massey-Smith made remarks on behalf of the NC Division of Aging and Adult Services about the Division's COVID-19 response and updates on the state's efforts to support aging adults. Joyce offered the Coalition the opportunity to share feedback and issues related to Coronavirus with DAAS. After Joyce's presentation, membership was invited to share feedback on how their organizations are doing amid the pandemic and how they can use support during this time. All information submitted will be

available via this newsletter. The Coalition discussed utilizing Zoom software for the next meeting as it will likely not be in person as well.

Additional 2020 Coalition Meeting Dates

- April 24
- May 29
- June 26
- August 28
- September 25 (annual meeting)
- October 23
- December 4

COVID-19 Updates

Please note that the most up-to-date information and questions regarding COVID-19 can be found by calling 2-1-1 or going to <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-response-north-carolina>

North Carolina Under “Stay-at-Home” Order

Starting Monday, March 30th Governor Cooper has issued a “stay-at-home” order for all 100 counties in North Carolina. This is in response to requests for this order from many including the NC Hospital Association, the NC Nurses Association, and many counties who had already enacted the order. The stay-at-home order will last 30 days and end on April 29. It bans gatherings of 10 or more people. Those who go outside must maintain at least 6 feet of social distancing except around members of their family or household. Permitted reasons for leaving home include health and safety; outdoor activities; certain types of work; and getting necessary supplies and services for food, groceries, household supplies, items needed to work from home and for automobiles. Essential jobs that are exempted from the stay at home order include health care, public health, infrastructure, government operations, human services, food and beverage production, agriculture, media, financial and insurance institutions, and businesses that meet social distancing requirements. There are several exemptions for retail businesses deemed essential including restaurants and grocery stores, laundromats, bookstores that sell educational materials, hardware stores, lawn and garden retailers and gas stations and beer, wine and liquor retailers. [Click here to see what it means for nonprofits.](#)

North Carolina Receives Federal Disaster Declaration for COVID-19, All Counties Eligible for FEMA

The White House approved Gov. Cooper’s request for a federal disaster declaration which clears the path for all 100 counties in North Carolina to be eligible for FEMA support. [Click here for full article on the impact of the declaration.](#)

North Carolina Reports Updated Coronavirus Numbers

State officials reported another 127 North Carolina cases of COVID-19 in less than eight hours on Sunday. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services reported 1,040 cases in the state on Sunday morning. Then just before 6 p.m., the state reported a new number of 1,167. State officials

are reporting five deaths and 91 hospitalizations. There have been 18,945 completed coronavirus tests. The majority of cases are people between the ages of 25 and 49 years old. The case counts don't give a full picture of how widespread COVID-19 is, DHHS says. Not all patients with the illness are tested. (News and Observer, March 29) *Please note these numbers will continue to evolve as updates are made.

House Select Committee on COVID-19 Requests Public Comments on How to Combat Virus

Last week, a newly launched House Select Committee on COVID-19 launched to tackle the healthcare response and needs in regards to the Coronavirus. During the first meeting, the NC Healthcare Association spoke about the needs of the hospitals including increased Medicaid, financial assistance, among other items aimed to help with the burden of the virus. The committee is seeking feedback from the public and the Coalition will be putting forth recommendations on how to best support older adults during this time. The public can listen to a live stream of the meetings on the General Assembly website. [To learn more and subscribe to notifications click here.](#)

Virus Projections in NC

North Carolina will be short hundreds of hospital beds and intensive care units at the state's peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still weeks away, according to a model touted by a leading expert on Sunday. Developed by the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, the model estimates that there will be dozens of COVID-19-related deaths daily during the virus' projected peak. The model projects 79 COVID-19 deaths in North Carolina on April 22, with about 2,400 people in the state dying from the disease by Aug. 4.

North Carolina could face a shortage of hospital beds from April 17 until April 27, according to the model, which shows the need for beds for COVID-19 patients peaking at 7,774, including 1,173 intensive care unit beds. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in North Carolina, the state will have a shortage of about 600 intensive care unit beds and nearly 700 hospital beds, according to projections from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. The projections estimate North Carolina's peak to come on April 22. The projections estimate the maximum need for ventilators, which effectively breathe for patients who cannot do so on their own, to peak shortly before the needs for beds does, climbing as high as 661 on April 19 and beginning to gradually recede.

According to data released Sunday by the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, the number of available beds and intensive care unit beds falls short of the projected need. Of 3,223 intensive care unit beds available in the state, 691 are open, while 5,726 of the 14,594 in-patient hospital beds are available. DHHS' information only includes 70% of state hospitals. (News and Observer, March 29, 2020, Adam Wagner)

State Lawmakers Start Moving on Coronavirus Relief

A bipartisan committee that's been newly formed to address coronavirus needs heard from providers about their cash flow and equipment needs. Last week, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle started discussions (open to the public to listen to by going to the General Assembly's website and clicking on

the Committees section) about how to best position North Carolina to succeed during this pandemic. (NC Health News, March 27,2020, Rose Hoban) [Click here for the full story.](#)

Families First Coronavirus Response Act Provides Financial Relief for Meals for Older Adults

Tuesday, March 24th, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced \$250 million in grants from the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to help communities provide meals for older adults. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act, signed into law by President Trump on March 18, 2020, provided the additional funding for the nutrition services programs authorized by the Older Americans Act (OAA). The need for these services, particularly home-delivered and packaged meals, has increased as community measures to slow transmission of COVID-19 have closed meal sites and impacted family caregiving. Funding has been provided to states, territories, and tribes for subsequent allocation to local meal providers. Grant amounts are determined based on the population-based formulas defined in the OAA. ACL released a Fiscal FAQ yesterday related to the supplemental funds provided by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) for congregated meals and home delivered meals. The FAQs address state and area plan administration, match requirements, transfer of funds, reporting requirements, and distribution of funding. The HHS announcement and FAQ can be accessed from the [ADvancing States COVID-19 website](#).

CARES Act Provides Significant Relief for Nonprofits

On Friday afternoon, President Trump signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) into law. The CARES Act provides significant relief for nonprofits struggling through the COVID-19 crisis and for many of their employees and clients. Four provisions of the bill are of particular importance to charitable nonprofits:

1. Most nonprofits with fewer than 500 employees will have access to [forgivable small business loans to nonprofits with 500 or fewer employees](#) that will allow them to cover the costs of payroll, operations, and debt service during the COVID-19 crisis. These loans, known as SBA 7(a) loans, will be forgiven for organizations that maintain their staff between March 1 and June 30, essentially turning them into grants.
2. The bill includes significant [unemployment relief for workers and \(partially\) for many nonprofits](#). Workers who lose their jobs for Coronavirus-related reasons – including employees of churches, religious nonprofits, and small charitable nonprofits (under four employees) – will be eligible for \$600 per week of supplemental unemployment benefits (paid by the federal government). The federal government will also pay for half of the unemployment claims of self-insured nonprofits, leaving these organizations responsible for reimbursing states for the other half of these costs.
3. Regardless of whether they itemize, taxpayers can use a [\(limited\) universal charitable deduction for 2020](#), capped at \$300 per year. The bill also strengthens incentives for businesses and high-income Americans to give more generously to support the work of nonprofits.
4. To help preserve jobs and businesses, Congress included a [wide variety of appropriations that will help many types of nonprofits](#).

AARP NC Facebook Town Hall Scheduled March 31, 2020

On March 31, 2020 @ 11:30 AM EDT North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper and Secretary Mandy Cohen will help you learn how to stay informed and healthy during the COVID-19 outbreak during this live

telephone town hall with AARP North Carolina. He will be joined by state health officials to answer your questions. You can use the link to sign up for this important call, or listen to the call on Facebook www.facebook.com/aarpnc

NC Looking for Health Care Volunteer Workers

Per the Department of Health and Human Services “We are facing an unprecedented crisis from COVID-19 that has already had devastating consequences internationally. With the virus now spreading in North Carolina, we need to bolster our health care system to ensure we can care for those impacted by the virus. A crucial part of that effort is recruiting volunteers to supplement our health care workforce. We are asking for your help to meet these needs. North Carolina has built a medical response capability through our state’s Health Care Coalitions (HCCs) that can augment all levels of care to citizens affected by a disaster event. The capability includes medical supplies and equipment, as well as volunteer health care and medical professionals who are willing to deploy to affected areas or facilities to provide patient care. This response is provided through the State Medical Response System (SMRS), which recruits and manages volunteers in the following areas: • Clinical (physicians, advanced care providers, nurses, EMS) • Clinical Support (pharmacy, imaging and respiratory care) • Non-clinical support (facility maintenance, safety, and administrative) We are also asking volunteers to provide medical supplies if they are able, including personal protective equipment. If you are able to volunteer, please register through the NC Training, Exercise, and Response Management System (NC TERMS). That system can be accessed through: <https://terms.ncem.org/TRS/>.”

Unprotected and Unprepared: Home health aids who care for sick, elderly brace for COVID-19

The Washington Post highlights the complicated nature of home health aids who are often underpaid and visit multiple seniors in one day and the impact they could have on the spread of Coronavirus. [Click here to read the article.](#)

Supply Shortage Prompts NC to Limit Coronavirus Testing

The limited number of Coronavirus tests that North Carolina has access to has caused the state to determine who can and cannot be tested with preference going towards the elderly, those with underlying conditions, first responders and health care employees. [Click here to read the full article about the shortage.](#)

How Medicaid Could Play a Role in Enhancing State Capacity to Respond to Coronavirus

With 1 in 5 Americans using Medicaid, the opportunity to play a larger role in the response to Coronavirus is there. The Kaiser Family Foundation investigates what that role would look like. [Click here to read the article.](#)

NC Looks to Telehealth and Hotlines for Mental Health During Coronavirus Crises

North Carolina moves towards telehealth hotline numbers to support those experiencing mental health struggles during isolation and social distance guidelines. The numbers that the NC hotlines have already experienced surged compared to this time last year, and can most likely be associated with times of

hurricanes in the state. Coping with stress related to the Coronavirus is becoming increasingly important as the time goes on. [Click here to read the full article.](#)

Note: NC Baptist Aging Ministry (a Coalition member) is also hosting 3 hotline numbers for senior's in North Carolina experiencing loneliness as a result of isolation.

It's Time to Get Serious About End-of-Life Care for Coronavirus Patients

Time looks into the Coronavirus and end-of-life care/end-of-life requests and what the pandemic means for your dying wishes. This article explains the importance of understanding this during the Coronavirus crises. [Click here to read.](#)

AARP Launches Community Connections Platform to Give/Find Help During the Coronavirus Pandemic

AARP Community Connections, a new online platform launched by AARP Innovation Labs today, allows users to organize and find local volunteer groups to help pick up groceries, provide financial assistance or lend emotional support to neighbors, friends and loved ones. Across the country, these informal online groups—also called “mutual aid” groups—help communities stay connected at a time when people must practice social distancing to stay safe. [Click here to access the connection platform.](#) [Click here for additional AARP COVID-19 Resources](#)

How Many Adults are at Risk of Serious Illness if Infected with Coronavirus?

The Kaiser Family Foundation looks into the numbers. [Click here to check them out.](#)

Northampton County Rest Home

A small assisted-living facility in Northampton County (Pine Forest Rest Home) is dealing with a coronavirus outbreak that has caused nearly all of the 22 residents and three staff to test positive for COVID-19, a member of the staff confirmed. The rural county in the northeastern part of North Carolina reported a [spike of 20 cases Saturday](#), bringing the total in the county to 25, according to a news release. [Health officials said all but one of the positive cases](#) come from the same facility, according to the release. (News and Observer, March 28, 2020, Steve Wiseman and Dan Kane)

Lilly Providing Emergency Supplies of Insulin if in Need

Individuals with diabetes who are in urgent need for insulin can turn to Lilly (www.lilly.com) during the pandemic. If someone has an immediate need, Lilly can help them obtain an emergency supply of insulin. In the U.S., they can call the Lilly Diabetes Solution Center at (833) 808-1234. For other Lilly medicines, they can dial 800-LillyRx (1-800-545-5979)

PHI Launches a Series of Articles About the Impact of Coronavirus on Direct Care Workers

PHI President discusses the implications of COVID-19 on the Direct Care Workforce and the launch of their new series aimed at taking a look at that. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Coronavirus Resources from the National Association for Home Care and Hospice

[Click here for a full list of resources.](#)

Legislative Updates

State Elections Board Recommends Changes for 2020 Election Amid Coronavirus

The State Board of Elections has released a list of recommendations to help making voting safe and accessible in 2020 despite the ongoing threat of Coronavirus. The three main recommendations are: Modifying the absentee by-mail voting process, ensuring that an adequate number of poll workers will be available, and providing funding to cover the costs associated with the risks. [Click here for the full article.](#)

Voter ID Issue Rejected

A North Carolina appeals court recently rejected a request by Republican lawmakers for its full cadre of judges to rehear a challenge over implementing voter photo identification. The Court of Appeals denied the motion by the COP legislative leaders. The Voter ID law had already been blocked by a federal judge last December. Because of the rejection to take up the issue, unless it is brought before the State Supreme Court, it is likely that the Voter ID law will not be in place for the 2020 election. The law was rejected after three appeals judges said there appeared to be evidence of “discriminatory intent” by Republican legislators that would harm African American voters disproportionately. Republican legislators disagreed. It is unlikely to be taken back up. [Click here for the full article on the story.](#)

News in North Carolina

Unemployment Payments Begin Soon

North Carolinians will begin receiving unemployment payments this week as Gov. Cooper signed an executive order loosening restrictions on filing unemployment claims. This will allow those who have been laid off as a result of the Coronavirus to file claims without having the provision of actively searching for a job given the current state of the world. Since loosening the restrictions, 270,000 claims have been filed, compared to 7,500 at this time last year, signaling that the impact of the Coronavirus is being felt in job loss and financial insecurity.

Budget Stalemate Continues

Eight county commissions — most of them all-Republican or majority Republican — have recently passed resolutions calling for an end to the state’s budget stalemate. So has the bipartisan Greenville City Council and the Union County school board. While some of the resolutions specifically call on lawmakers to override Gov. Roy Cooper’s budget veto, others use more vague language.

Senate leader Phil Berger’s office has been tracking the resolutions and promoting the budget statements in news releases. So far, all-Republican county commissions in Avery, Caldwell, Iredell, Gaston, Union, Johnston and Cabarrus have approved resolutions, with many of them listing local

projects that would be funded through earmarks in the vetoed budget bill. The Sampson County Commission, which has three Republicans and two Democrats, voted unanimously in support of its resolution earlier this month. But their call to action doesn't mention an override vote. The commission "strongly encourages all members of the General Assembly to act in accordance with the needs of the state and support Sampson County by taking measures to ensure these important programs, including in the proposed state budget, are funded for the communities that they will so clearly benefit."

Commissioners in Iredell County worried that the continued stalemate results in uncertainty for "half" the county's budget that's dependent on state funds for schools and other initiatives. "It has a very real impact on our budgeting process that is normally hitting high gear right now," one of them said, according to video of the meeting. "We need some action."

Greenville's unanimous resolution is the most bipartisan action calling for budget action, as its council consists of four registered Republicans and three registered Democrats. "I think our hopes are that people put aside their differences and understand how important it is for us to support Eastern North Carolina, and understand that there are a lot of benefits," said Mayor P.J. Connelly, who is a Republican. Greenville has a lot at stake in the budget, including \$215 million for a new medical school facility at East Carolina University. But the resolution doesn't call for override and is worded similarly to the Sampson County resolution. "The City of Greenville strongly encourages all members of the General Assembly to act in accordance with the needs of the State and support the eastern region of North Carolina by taking measures to ensure these important programs for the institutions and communities that they will so clearly benefit," it says. (The Insider, March 13, 2020)

Medicaid Reform Rollout May Be a Late 2020 Arrival

The state budget impasse has kept health officials and insurers stuck in neutral when it comes to the Medicaid managed care transition. The implementation of the initiative was halted due to the budget funding not being released given the Governor's veto. The Medicaid expansion would provide valuable services for the North Carolinians who enroll in Medicaid. [Click here for the full article.](#) (Winston Salem Journal, March 10, 2020, Richard Carver)

Absentee Vote Law Ruled Unconstitutional

A portion of a 2019 North Carolina law designed to toughen mail-in absentee ballot rules following a fraud investigation in a congressional race went too far and is unconstitutional, a lawsuit filed first week of March contends. Lawyers for Advance Carolina, a group that works in part to get African Americans out to vote, said the new limits on who can help someone fill out requests to obtain a ballot violate state constitutional protections. The group wants enforcement blocked of what it calls the new "application organizing ban."

The ban not only denies "voters valuable assistance in obtaining absentee ballots to facilitate their political participation, but it also infringes on the core political speech and associational activities of organizations and citizens working to increase voter turnout," attorney Burton Craige wrote in the lawsuit filed in Wake County Superior Court. The law was approved by the House and Senate in October with only one "no" vote and signed by Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper.

Supporters of the legislation say it attempted to combat illegal ballot “harvesting,” which occurred in the 9th Congressional District campaign in 2018, according to evidence collected in a State Board of Elections probe. The investigation led to a new 9th District election last September.

The traditional absentee ballot process remained largely the same in the new law: a registered voter fills out a ballot request form that gets sent to the elections board in their home county. The county board then sends an absentee “application” and a clean ballot to the voter, who then fills out both. While the measure increased criminal penalties for people who attempt to sell or destroy others’ completed absentee ballots, Advance Carolina said it made no sense to further restrict who could help fill out a ballot request to only the voter or a close relative. The collection of completed or partially completed ballots was the key element in the absentee ballot probe in the 9th District, focused on a Republican operative in Bladen County.

An outside individual had been previously able to help with the ballot request form, which allowed political groups to implement get-out-the-vote efforts. Now, the lawsuit says, there are now “greater restrictions on completing absentee ballot applications than it does for filling out and submitting absentee ballots.” This amounts to an unconstitutional burden on the right to vote, according to Advance Carolina.

The state and the State Board of Elections are the defendants in the case. Joseph Kyzer, a spokesman for House Speaker Tim Moore, told WRAL-TV the bipartisan law doesn’t prevent any organization from encouraging absentee voting and will be defended by legislators. The plaintiffs’ lawyers also include several from a Washington, D.C., law firm that helped represent Democrat Dan McCready, who ran unsuccessfully for the 9th District seat in 2018 and 2019. He and his campaign weren’t accused of any wrongdoing. (The Insider/ The Associated Press March 5, 2020)

Raleigh Named Best Place to Retire in North Carolina, Top 10 in County

North Carolina gained the third most retirees of any state, a recent study showed with Raleigh being the top spot in the state for those 60+ to relocate to. In fact, in 2018 more than 14,000 retirees were added to the state, a large uptick from years previous. North Carolina is outranked only by Florida and Arizona, two likely contenders for their nice weather. [Click here to read more.](#)

Lifespan Respite Vouchers Awarded

All Lifespan Respite Vouchers from the NC Lifespan Respite Program have been awarded and they are no longer accepting applications. If there is an emergency or a crisis situation please reach out to Pat Guarnieri at 828-265-5434 ext. 139 and leave a message.

Burr Requests Investigation

Senator Richard Burr asked Senate ethics officials for a complete review of his February stock sales amid growing critics questioning the timing of the sale. Critics are questioning when Burr sold up to \$1.7M in stocks while he was being briefed on Coronavirus issues in America. He maintains that his decision was solely based on public information. Burr is one of four senators that critics are calling for an investigation on after selling stocks in the last few months. [Click here for the full story.](#)

State Health Plan Taps Humana for Medicare Advantage Plan

The State Health Plan and State Treasurer Dale Folwell announced this week that [the plan will contract with Humana to provide Medicare Advantage plans](#) beginning Jan. 1, 2021. The three-year contract will save the plan an estimated \$590 million. It comes at no additional cost to taxpayers or the plan, and will save 155,000 plan members money. All base plans will come with no premium costs for members including dependents and family members. All enhanced plans will come with a cost decrease as well.

Interested in Seeing How Healthy Your County Is?

[Click here for an interactive map.](#)

Partner's Corner

(This year we begin a new feature for our *Update*. Each month our partner agencies/organization will share a message)

Thank you to our 2020 partners! If you are interested in learning how to become a partner and have a message to the Coalition's membership in the newsletter, please email executivedirector@nccoalitiononaging.org

United Healthcare- Premium Sponsor

As we all adjust to the new normal of working and providing care during a global pandemic and state-wide shelter-in-place order United Healthcare wanted to share information on UnitedHealth Groups resources and response details.

- Emotional-Support Help Line Available (access to specially trained mental health specialists to support people who may be experiencing anxiety or stress following the recent developments around COV-19). This support is available to everyone nationwide at no cost. The toll-free help line number, 866-342-6892. It is open open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- United HealthCare has waived all member cost sharing, including copays, coinsurance and deductibles, for COVID-19 diagnostic testing provided at approved locations in accordance with CDC guidelines for all commercial insured, Medicaid and Medicare members. United HealthCare is also supporting self-insured customers choosing to implement similar actions.
- OptumCare clinicians across the country are well prepared and providing compassionate care to COVID-19 patients of the more than 18 million people we serve through our primary care practices, urgent care centers, and in patient homes and nursing homes.
- UHC is authorizing a one-time override of the refill too soon (RTS) edit for members. This allows any member of a UHC insurance plan to refill their prescriptions early.
- Health plan members are encouraged to use United HealthCare's Virtual Visit capability, available through the United HealthCare app, to help answer any general questions or concerns they might have.
- If individuals have travel plans, be sure to check out the [CDC travel advisory](#), including the recently released [CDC travel guidance for older Americans, people with underlying health concerns and all people planning cruise ship travel](#).
- You can find additional information about process and policy changes and other COVID related work at:
 - [UHG to Give \\$50 Million to Support COVID Response](#)
 - [UnitedHealth Group Study Clears Path for Self-Administered COVID-19 Test](#)

- [UnitedHealthcare Reduces Administrative Requirements to Improve Access to Care and Coverage in Response to COVID-19](#)
- In addition, please visit www.uhc.com

Transitions LifeCare and The Association for Home and Hospice Care- Champion Sponsor

Thank you to our sponsors Transitions LifeCare and The Association for Home and Hospice Care for their involvement in, and support of, the NC Coalition on Aging.

North Carolina Assisted Living Association and Poyner Spruill- Champion Sponsor

Thank you to our sponsors North Carolina Assisted Living Association and Poyner Spruill for their involvement in, and support of, the NC Coalition on Aging.

People of Note

Philip Thomas Hired as new Political Director and Chief Counsel for NC Republican Party

N.C. Republican Party Chairman Michael Whatley announced Friday that Philip Thomas has been hired and began work as the new Political Director and Chief Counsel for the North Carolina Republican Party. Thomas comes to the party after working as the deputy general counsel for the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. He has previous experience in every branch of state government — including working with Lt. Gov. Dan Forest’s general counsel, the legislature, the N.C. Court of Appeals and several administrative agencies. He also has campaign experience, having worked with several state and congressional campaigns as well as Americans for Prosperity. He originally hails from Guilford County and is a graduate of UNC Charlotte and Campbell University School of Law.

Rep. Mary Ann Black Passes

Rep. MaryAnn Black, D-Durham, a former Durham County commissioner and a long-time social worker, has died. She was 76. She had been undergoing treatment for cancer, Indy Week reported Thursday. Black was a clinical social worker for more than 30 years, and in 1994 was named “Social Worker of the Year” by the National Association of Social Workers, according to her biography for Duke Health, where she worked in recent years as associate vice president for community relations. Black served on the Durham County Commission from 1990 to 2002 and chaired the commission from 1996 to 2002. She was, at one point, president of the Durham Downtown Rotary, and in 2006 was the first female chair of the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce Board. Black was a supporter and friend of aging issues and the Coalition on Aging and will be missed by all.

Durham County Democratic activists will now choose someone to fill her seat through 2020. A likely replacement is Durham City Council member Vernetta Alston, who is the only candidate seeking the seat that Black wasn’t running for this November. (Associated Press, March 27, 2020)

SEANC Hires Ardis Watkins as Executive Director

State Employees Association of North Carolina hires first female Executive Director in 73 year history, Ardis Watkins. Watkins, an attorney, has worked as a lobbyist and Director of Government Relations for

SEANC since January 2001, and worked at the N.C. Department of Labor as the Director of Employment Mediation for eight years prior to joining the SEANC staff.

Mark Meadows Named President Trump's Chief of Staff

Mark Meadows, who was serving his fourth term as NC's 11th Congressional District representative has been named President Donald Trump's new Chief of Staff. His vacated seat will be contested between Democratic contestant Moe Davis and which ever Republican wins in the May 12th run off.

National Updates and News

Older American's Act Reauthorized and Signed Into Law

The 2020 Older Americans Act (OAA) reauthorization bill, Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020, was signed into law by President Trump yesterday.

This five-year reauthorization includes several elder justice provisions, including:

- Reauthorizing OAA Title VII programs and including a seven percent increase in 2020 and a six percent increase per year for the next four fiscal years. (Title VII authorizes the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program as well as Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Prevention Programs);
- Updating the maintenance of effort funding provisions for the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program;
- Calling for a report on senior legal hotlines;
- Clarifying that volunteer ombudsman representatives can be reimbursed for costs incurred through their service, such as transportation costs;
- Updating elder justice activities to include community outreach and education as part of the multidisciplinary efforts.

EJC National Coordinator Bob Blancato added, "This strong bipartisan reauthorization will allow the programs and services of the OAA to continue uninterrupted in this critical time period. This includes the important work of the long-term care ombudsmen, especially during this COVID-19 crisis where they must monitor the status of vulnerable nursing home residents as safely and effectively as possible."

In [remarks](#) in the Congressional Record, Sen. Chuck Grassley commended the Elder Justice Coalition and its members for their work on the reauthorization.

A section-by-section of the reauthorization is [here](#); the bill text is [here](#).

Real ID Deadline Extended

The Federal Government has extended the deadline for the Real ID program (required updated identification in order to travel by plane) in lieu of the Coronavirus. The updated deadline is October 1, 2020. For more information go to www.tsa.gov/real-id

Nursing Home Plans Updated Last Year (In Some Instances)

Federal regulators last year ordered nursing homes to prepare for emerging infectious diseases. Outbreaks of Ebola and Zika had prompted the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to deem planning for an epidemic “critical.” Nursing homes were supposed to update their emergency plans. But not everyone complied.

Eighty percent of those who have died from COVID-19 were 65 or older, a preliminary analysis of U.S. data by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows. People with underlying health conditions, a description that fits nearly all nursing home residents, are at particular risk. At Life Care Center of Kirkland in Washington state, the initial epicenter of the U.S. outbreak, 81 residents were infected, a CDC investigation found. Staff and visitors were infected too. More than two dozen people died.

The quality of emergency plans at elder-care facilities in North Carolina varies widely. Assisted-living facilities must have a disaster plan, but they are not subject to any minimum standards. The plans are frequently cursory, as short as six pages. Nursing homes that accept Medicare payments have to comply with much more stringent regulation. In February 2019, CMS added “emerging infectious diseases” to the threats they must consider. To evaluate facilities’ readiness, The News & Observer requested disaster plans from officials in 20 counties. (News and Observer, March 28, 2020, Carli Brosseau, Dan Kane and Steve Wiseman) [Click here for full article.](#)

Insulin Costs May Be Capped in a Medicare Program

Drug companies, insurers and the Trump administration are working together to determine if they can cap insulin costs at \$35/month for some older adults who are on Medicare. [Click here to read the full article.](#)

Direct Care Workers Can Address Social Isolation and Loneliness

A great article from PHI about the impact that direct care workers can have on social isolation and loneliness. [Click here to read.](#)

Important Dates

- April 3: Deadline to submit Promising Practice Contest: Addressing the LTSS Workforce Shortage
 - Advancing States Submission
 - [Click here for details](#)
- April 15: Advancing States webinar: Turning gray and into the red. The true cost of growing old in America
 - 3:00pm
 - [Click here to register](#)
- August 30-September 4 : Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging Conference
 - Asheville, NC
 - www.se4a.org
- August 31-September 3 : Advancing State’s Home and Community-Based Services Conference
 - Washington, DC
 - www.hcbsconference.org

- Ongoing: Nonprofit Town Halls
 - The NC Center for Nonprofits is hosting a series of nonprofit policy discussions
 - Click here to find a session near you: <https://www.ncnonprofits.org/events/nonprofit-town-halls>

Thank you to everyone who is working to help take care of North Carolina during this pandemic. If there is ever anything we can do to support you, please let me know.

If you have any questions about the newsletter or would like to be featured in next months, please email Allison Costanzo Executive Director, executivedirector@nccoalitiononaging.org Be well!