



## MHA Legislative Update: March 2015

### Policymakers, Mental Health Community Stakeholders Attend MHA's Annual Legislative Breakfast



On March 23, MHA of Central Carolinas, in collaboration with MHA in Cleveland County, hosted its annual legislative breakfast event at the Duke Mansion. The topic centered on the #B4Stage4 campaign championed by MHA's national affiliate, Mental Health America. The campaign is an in-depth, online program, specifically aimed at those working to improve mental health across the nation. To learn more about #B4Stage4, visit [Mental Health America's website](#).

Six panelists from across Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Cleveland, and Lincoln counties delivered presentations on four stages of mental illness: prevention, early intervention and identification, integrated care and treatment, and recovery. Panelists included Rachel Kitson, PhD, Southeast Psych; Ulli Rische, Human Rights Committee Member, Partners Behavioral Health Management; Robert Herman-Smith, PhD, MSW, MA, Associate Professor, UNCC School of Social Work; Melissa Candela, MSW, LCSW, Program Coordinator, Behavioral Health Integration; Antoinette Souffrant, LCSW, CSAC, Uptown Psychology and; Patty Schaeffer, CFAC Member and WRAP Group Facilitator.

The event was well attended, and policymakers from the local and state levels were able to hear from panelists that prevention, early intervention, and integrated care and treatment are all necessary components to achieving mental wellness and that recovery is possible. To view the fact sheets with legislative "asks" and PowerPoint presentations from the event, please visit the [Advocacy section of our website](#).

(Pictured above from left to right: Dave Zimmer, MHA of Central Carolinas Board President; Pender R. McElroy, James, McElroy & Diehl, P.A., Attorneys at Law; Kenneth Schorr, Executive Director, Legal Services of Southern Piedmont.)

### Senate Bill Introduction Deadline Passed, New Bill Highlights

Several new bills impacting health and mental health were introduced in both the House and Senate during the month of March, culminating in the March 26 Senate cutoff date for most new bills to be filed. The House filing deadline is April 8 for most proposals, excluding budget and tax bills. Highlights include:

**SB 288**, Amend Laws Regarding Mental Commitment Bars, would allow individuals who have been found to lack the capacity to manage their own affairs "due to marked subnormal intelligence, mental illness, or incompetency" to file a petition to remove firearms disabilities after restoration to competency. The measure would also more narrowly restrict the types of incompetence findings that must be reported to the National Instant Criminal Background Check system.

SB 365 and its House companion, HB 330, would expand eligibility to all persons under age 65 whose income is below 133% of the Federal Poverty Level, as well as appropriate funds associated with Medicaid expansion, account for the savings to other state programs as a result of the expansion, and appropriate the additional funds generated from expansion to the Medicaid rebase.

SB 423, the Foster Care Family Act, would amend the law to study the use of the 1915(c) Medicaid waiver for children who qualify under "Serious Emotional Disturbance" (SED), which could help keep children in foster care with severe emotional disturbances in their homes and out of institutions. The bill would also allow foster children to participate in various activities that non-foster children have access to, such as apply for a driver's license or play sports in school, thereby reducing stigma for foster care children.

SB 445, Burt's Law, would increase punishment for abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a consumer enrolled in a mental health, developmental disability, or substance abuse program.

SB 490, Increase Access to MH Services, would direct the Legislative Research Commission to study a public-private hospital partnership to increase access to mental health services.

SB 496, Protect MH/DD/SA Clients from Abuse, would increase penalties for employees who fail repeatedly to report abuse, neglect, exploitation, or injury of people being served in a facility for mental illness, developmental disabilities, or substance abuse.

SB 676, Autism Health Insurance Coverage, would ensure insurance coverage for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in NC.

### Medicaid Reform

There are several reform bills that have been introduced in both the House and Senate. SB 574 and a similar House bill, HB 372, would create capitated, provider led health plans for the Medicaid population. SB 696 is a comprehensive and detailed bill which would transform the NC Medicaid program to a full-risk capitated system over the next 4 years, and create a new Health Benefits Authority to manage Medicaid and NC Health Choice. In a similar vein, Senator Berger introduced SB 703, which would change the Medicaid program from a mostly fee-for-service model to a fully capitated & risk-based managed care model. The transformation would happen by January 1, 2017 with at least 3 area managed care organizations (MCOs) taking on full risk for all Medicaid beneficiaries.

## Senate Files New Legislation on Dorothea Dix Property

Also on March 26, the Senate filed SB 705, legislation that would put the Dorothea Dix property up for bid, starting at \$52 million. You may recall that Raleigh agreed to pay \$52 million for the property after labored negotiations with Governor McCrory. The city planned to use the property to construct a city park, endangering the existing historic buildings and the patients' cemetery. Mental health advocates argued that using the property for purely recreational purposes would be a disservice to Dorothea Dix's legacy.



The measure ensures that the proceeds from the sale would be deposited into the Mental Health Trust Fund, which will be used to provide startup funds and operating support for community based programs. Read more about the legislation [here](#).

## US House Passes CHIP Extension

On March 26, the US House of Representatives passed the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act, bipartisan legislation which would extend the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for two years. In North Carolina, CHIP is known as NC Health Choice and provides health insurance coverage for children who don't qualify for Medicaid, but can't afford insurance on the private market. Also in the massive overhaul legislation is language that would fix the flawed Medicare formula for reimbursing doctors. The bill now moves to the U.S. Senate. Read more [here](#).

**Thank you to our MHA advocates who participated in last week's Action Alert by writing to your Representatives urging them to pass this bill. This is a prime example of how your voice makes a difference!**

**Remember, you can contact your policy makers at any time:**

<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Representation/WhoRepresentsMe.aspx>

<http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>

### Mental Health Training Opportunities

Inquire about MHA Training opportunities in your area. We offer Mental Health First Aid (Youth, Adult and Public Safety versions), QPR Suicide Prevention (Gatekeeper, Adapted for Refugees and Train the Trainer), Advocacy, and Managing Money in Recovery.

**Contact Nancy Woodard about MHA trainings at email: [nwoodard@mhacentralcarolinas.org](mailto:nwoodard@mhacentralcarolinas.org) Or Phone 704-365-3454.**

A Member Agency



United Way of Central Carolinas

**MHA**  
**Spreading Hope, Spurring Action, Supporting Families, Saving Lives!** Contact us at 3701 Latrobe Drive, Ste 140, Charlotte, NC 28211. Visit [www.mhacentralcarolinas.org](http://www.mhacentralcarolinas.org) or email at [mha@mhacentralcarolinas.org](mailto:mha@mhacentralcarolinas.org) or call us at 704.365.3454. Our mission is to promote mental wellness through advocacy, prevention and education.



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*Address postal inquiries to:*  
Mental Health Association of Central Carolinas  
3701 Latrobe Drive, Suite 140  
Charlotte, NC 28211  
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