



Representative McLawhorn's News from Raleigh

February 14, 2008

According to the American Association of People with Disabilities, there are more than 50 million Americans with disabilities. This session we passed laws to help people with disabilities in a number of ways, including providing money for much needed programs and passing laws to protect the disabled. Thank you for allowing me to share this information with you. Please let me know if I can help you in any way.

Housing

_The Housing Trust Fund will receive \$7.5 million to provide additional independent and supportive living apartments for low-income people with disabilities. The fund also assists low-income disabled people with necessary repairs and renovations. These repairs and renovations make the homes handicapped-accessible and provide services for those with mental illnesses. An additional \$8 million has been set aside to pay for the operational costs of these apartments.

Money for the new apartments is part of the Housing 400 Initiative the General Assembly launched in 2005 to create independent and supportive apartments affordable for low-income disabled people.

High-Risk Insurance Pool

_This session the General Assembly also ratified a bill (HB 265) that will create a high risk insurance pool to help those who suffer from serious or terminal illnesses. These people are often considered uninsurable or are forced to pay expensive premiums because of their illness. This pool will make sure they get the affordable insurance they deserve and ultimately receive the preventative care they need to stay healthy.

Safety

_This session we passed a law that will increase penalties for harming disabled patients in health care facilities. The law (HB 554) makes it a felony to cause bodily injury to a patient or resident of a health care or residential care facility.

Disability History and Awareness Month

_October will be recognized as Disability History and Awareness Month in North Carolina. Under a new law (SB 753), school boards will provide instruction during this month on disabilities, people with disabilities, and the disability rights movement.

Health Care Facilities

_Community health centers and groups are on the frontline of the battle to keep our people strong. These facilities often assist those who are disabled and cannot afford private care. This session's budget includes \$5 million for rural health centers, free clinics and school-based clinics.

Disability Benefits

_A new law (HB 1415) allows people in the state retirement system to receive 65 percent of their salary for up to three years if they suffer a long-term disability. After three years, the benefit will continue if the person receives Social Security benefits.

Services for the Deaf and Blind

_We made some changes to the Communication Services Assistive Equipment Loan Program provided by the Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Under the new law, the division will expand the types of communication and alerting equipment available for those who qualify for the program. The division will also train people to use the equipment. All public safety offices and health care facilities must have telecommunications devices that are equivalent to those on loan.

_My colleagues and I have set aside \$75,000 so that we can provide accessible electronic information services for the blind and disabled.

_We set aside \$1.1 million for new positions in the Division of Services for the Blind. This money will pay for three additional counselors and a technology instructor to train people in the use of assistive technology and devices.

_The Division of Services for the Blind will also receive \$400,000 to increase the eligibility level for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. We set aside another \$400,000 to increase the eligibility level for the Medical Eye Care Program. The eligibility level for both programs has now been increased to 125 percent of the federal poverty level.

_Legislators set aside \$150,000 for a grant-in-aid to Prevent Blindness North Carolina. This money will be used to expand the Pre-K Vision Screening Program.

_The Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing will receive \$123,000 for two Community Development Specialists and an Interpreter Services Consultant.

_The Department of Health and Human Services with the Department of Public Instruction will study the service delivery model for deaf and blind students. The study will focus on training needs of staff members, access to assistive technology, curriculum content and special needs resulting from any additional disabilities.

Schools for the Deaf and Blind

_Legislators appropriated \$249,000 for two behavior programming technicians at the Eastern NC School for the Deaf and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind. These technicians will help with the North Carolina Positive Behavior Support Program.

_The General Assembly has set aside \$458,300 for Beginnings, Inc. to provide family support for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

_Our budget also includes \$159,000 to add three student life services positions at the Governor Morehead School for the Blind.

_We appropriated \$164,000 for school resource officers at the Eastern NC School for the Deaf and the NC School for the Deaf in Morganton.