



The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

Your source for nonpartisan research and analysis

Accomplishments in 2012

Improving Public Policy

This was another great year for the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research in having our research affect public policy and improve the lives of the citizens of North Carolina.

■ **Progress in Reducing Fraud Against the Elderly** – In 2010, the Center released research showing that fraud committed against the elderly is on the rise in North Carolina. In response, Sen. Stan Bingham (R-Davidson) sponsored successful legislation in 2011 to create a Task Force on Fraud Against Older Adults within the Consumer Protection Division of the Attorney General’s office. The Task Force was charged to study the issue and all of the Center’s recommendations and then make a final report with draft legislation. Chaired by Sen. Bingham and Rep. Hugh Blackwell (R-Burke), the Task Force has produced a final report and specific recommendations for the 2013 legislature. These include working with banks to prevent fraud and working with the N.C. Conference of District Attorneys to prosecute more fraud cases.

■ **Making Federal Loans Available to More Students in N.C.’s Community Colleges** – In 2009, we were shocked to find that only 20 of North Carolina’s 58 community colleges made federal loan programs available to their students. After three years and legislative wins and losses, our work has led to more colleges offering federal loan programs. Now, 32 community colleges (12 more than when we began) offer federal loans to their students, giving 50,238 more students access to the safest and cheapest way to borrow money for college.

■ **Preventing and Reducing High School Dropouts** – Responding to our 2007 study of ways to prevent and reduce high school dropouts, the legislature appropriated \$13-15 million each year for four years (2007-10) for dropout prevention grants. And, as we recommended, the legislature *evaluated* the results of the previous years’ grants. As a result, the *statewide dropout rate now has declined for 4 years in a row*, and the graduation rate has increased 6 years in a row. The graduation rate reached an all-time high of 80 percent in North Carolina in new data released in August 2012.

■ **Evaluation of Judges’ Performance** – In 1980, the Center published *Article IV* – an evaluation of all Superior Court and appellate judges in the state. Since then, the Center has quietly urged leaders in the N.C. Bar Association to pick up this idea and make more information available to the public about the performance of judges, all of whom are elected in N.C. In 2012, the N.C. Bar Association published comprehensive information on the performance of District Court judges up for election, just as the Center pioneered 32 years ago.



The Center’s Mebane Rash testifies before the Task Force on Fraud Against Older Adults.

“The Center has been invaluable in raising issues that affect the elderly in our state. I’ve worked with their staff on the new state Task Force on Fraud Against Older Adults. Their fact-based, objective research has helped us develop legislation that we hope will prevent and reduce fraud committed against our vulnerable senior citizens. Because of the Center’s efforts, we will likely have new legislation in the 2013 session that will protect our seniors against scams and identity theft.”

Sen. Stan Bingham (R-Davidson), N.C. Senate, 2001-Present

“The Center is a tremendous resource for legislators and other policymakers. Their independent, nonpartisan research has helped us make higher education more accessible to people across North Carolina. Based on their research, I worked with them to help parents save money for their kids’ college education by improving our state’s College Savings Plan. It’s now easier to apply for loans to attend our public universities because we combined 12 loan forgiveness programs into one, and this saves taxpayers’ money too. And, many more community college students can now get low-cost federal loans instead of paying their tuition on credit cards – all because of the Center’s research and testimony.”

Rep. Ray Rapp (D-Madison), N.C. House of Representatives, 2003-2012

Center Wins National Award

In 2012, the Center won another national award from the Governmental Research Association (GRA), a nonpartisan group of 33 public policy nonprofits in 22 states. GRA organizations promote transparency in state and local budgets and provide information to citizens about the performance of government programs. The Center won an award for Outstanding Policy Achievement in recognition of the changes in state policy resulting from the Center's work on issues affecting the aging (such as the legislation on fraud against the elderly).

Conducting Nonpartisan Research on Key Public Policy Issues Facing North Carolina

Center Evaluates the State's Program To Serve Mental Health Patients at Local Hospitals – In December 2012, the Center released the first independent evaluation of a statewide initiative to purchase bed space and build capacity for mental health patients in crisis at local hospitals across North Carolina. The goal of the program is to increase the number of beds available for mental

health patients, keeping them out of hospital emergency rooms and out of the state psychiatric hospitals.

In 2008, the legislature first funded “three-way contracts” between the state, local mental health management entities (also called LMEs), and hospitals across the state. LMEs are the local agencies responsible for managing the provision of mental health services in the area served. The three-way contracts were developed as a way of moving North Carolina closer to the comprehensive local service system envisioned under the state's 2001 mental health reform legislation.

The Center's research findings include:

(1) The number of patients served under three-way contracts is almost as many as the total served each year by the three state psychiatric hospitals combined.

(2) Readmission rates for people served under the three-way contracts are lower than for those served in state hospitals.

(3) Short-term admissions (seven days or less) to state hospitals have dropped from 51 percent of total admissions in 2008-09 to 21 percent in 2011-12.

(4) The average length of stay in emergency departments for patients that were transferred to a community hospital was more than 12 hours shorter than the average length of stay for those that were transferred to a state psychiatric hospital.

(5) The average length of stay for patients served through the three-way contracts at all hospitals is less than seven days – as intended.

Based on its research, the Center made four recommendations to improve the program: (1) improve the timeliness of the payments to hospitals, (2) designate a state liaison and include hospitals in the state's working group on the contracts, (3) open state training programs to local hospital staff, and (4) evaluate patient outcomes.



Retiring from the N.C. Legislature: Former Speakers of the House Rep. Joe Hackney (D-Orange), left, and Rep. Harold Brubaker (R-Randolph), right

High Legislative Turnover – The modern records for highest legislative turnover were set in 1973 and 1975, when 65 and 70 new legislators, respectively, came to the General Assembly. North Carolina's legislative turnover in 2013 approached but did not surpass the record turnover of the mid-1970s. The Center's research showed there were four reasons for this year's legislative turnover – retirements, runs for higher office, accepting other jobs, and, most of all, redistricting.

In the 2011-12 legislature, there were already 46 freshman legislators (27 percent). Sixty-one more legislators are not returning at all or are not returning to the same chamber in 2013. Thus, in the 2013-14 General Assembly, 102 legislators (60 percent) will not have been there just three years ago. A combined 652 years of institutional memory and policy expertise will be lost with this much turnover. On the other hand, there will be room for lots of new ideas.

Enhancing Government Accountability

and roll call voting participation. Our effectiveness rankings are based on surveys of all 170 legislators themselves, registered lobbyists based in N.C., and all capital news media. We also released rankings of legislators' attendance and participation in roll call votes. The rankings of attendance and voting participation tell citizens how often their legislator was there to represent them. The effectiveness rankings tell citizens how effective their legislator was when he or she was there. Both help citizens assess their legislators' performance.

Rankings of the Most Influential Lobbyists – In July, we released the 16th edition of our rankings of the most influential lobbyists in the legislature, also based on surveys of the legislators, lobbyists, and capital news media. A record-setting 22 lobbyists were ranked among the most influential for the first time. The new faces include former legislators, corporate lobbyists, and some state agency legislative liaisons.

Rankings of Legislators' Effectiveness, Attendance, and Roll Call Voting Participation – In April, the Center continued to enhance government accountability and educate voters by publishing the 18th edition of our rankings of legislators' effectiveness, attendance

Rankings of Effectiveness, Attendance, and Roll Call Voting Participation for the North Carolina General Assembly

Rankings of the Most Influential Lobbyists in the North Carolina General Assembly



A report by

The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

Ann Swicker
July 2012



Top-Ranked Lobbyists: Dana Simpson, ranked #1, on left, and Tom Fetzer, #2, right.

Dana Simpson, an attorney with a Raleigh law firm, earned the top spot as North Carolina's most influential lobbyist. Simpson has been ranked among the most influential lobbyists since 2006 and was last ranked 14th. At age 38, Simpson is the youngest lobbyist ever to claim the top ranking. Another Raleigh attorney, John McMillan, who was at the top of the rankings in 2010, is still ranked 4th in this year's rankings.

With the first Republican majority in both chambers of the legislature since 1898, lobbyists with Republican ties fared well in the latest rankings. Joining the list of the most influential lobbyists for the first time were Tom Fetzer (2nd), Connie Wilson (7th), and Jimmy Broughton (43rd). Fetzer previously served as Chairman of the N.C. Republican Party and Mayor of Raleigh. Wilson is a former Republican legislator (1989-90 and 1993-2004). Broughton served for 12 years on the staff of former Republican U.S. Senator

Jesse Helms. Top-ranked Simpson served as the communications and policy director for the Republican House majority in the mid-1990s.

The Center publishes the rankings of the most influential lobbyists to help citizens understand which key interests and organizations have clout with legislators in North Carolina. The rankings shed light on what is often an invisible process.

"North Carolina is fortunate to have an independent, nonpartisan organization that analyzes the state's most pressing issues and evaluates the performance of our state government. And, they explain what's happening in plain English. As a reporter always in need of nonpartisan analysis of state government, I value the work of the Center and the service it provides to the citizens of North Carolina."

Bill O'Neil, WXII-TV News, Winston-Salem

Educating the Public

Increasing Our Use of Social Media and Storytelling – The Center's new Strategic Plan includes a goal of expanding the Center's reach, visibility, and impact by increasing our use of social media, storytelling, and technology.

The purpose is to expand the universe of people who know of and use the Center's research. We began by introducing our new Website in 2010, with all 35 years of the Center's research and expertise available free online. Then in 2011, for the first time, we published our *Citizens' Guide to the Legislature* online and for handheld devices such as smart phones.

In 2012, with a special grant from IBM, the Center focused on increasing our presence on social media through sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. We also increased our use of storytelling in order to help the public better understand issues, to illustrate to policymakers how a policy impacts people, and to connect the Center's accomplishments to changes that improve the lives of the citizens of North Carolina.

Board of Directors in 2012

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Looking Ahead to 2013

Citizen's Guide to the Legislature – In 2013, we will produce a new *Citizens' Guide to the 2013-2014 N.C. Legislature*. It will have biographical profiles and photos of all 170 members

of the General Assembly, as well as their committee appointments and counties in their districts. For legislators serving in the previous session, the guide will list five bills they introduced in the 2011-12 session and their votes on 12 bills of statewide interest. The guide will be available in book form and online.

Issues Affecting North Carolina's Aging Population – In 2011, the Baby Boom generation began turning 65, which will lead to the state's aging population almost doubling by 2030. In continuing our research, we'll look at shortages in nursing and other health care professions and how our state can train an adequate number of health care workers. We also will examine policy options for providing effective and efficient long-term care and in-home care. And, we'll examine the impact of this fast-growing aging population on the state budget.

Financial Aid for Students in Colleges, Universities, and Community Colleges – Our previous research on student financial aid led to significant changes in state policy for our 16 public universities and increased access to federal loans for community college students. In 2013, we'll expand our research to public and private colleges and universities and examine tuition and financial aid policy, as well as ways to improve our state's *college-going rates* and eventually improve our *college completion rates*.

Evaluating the State's Efforts in Mental Health Reform – Part III of our evaluation of the state's efforts in mental health reform in 2013 will (1) analyze how to produce and retain enough workers to treat and serve patients and (2) examine how mental health reform has worked or not worked in other states. We will focus on six states – three with better mental health systems than us and three with worse systems. Based on our research on the needs of the patients, the funding streams, the experiences in other states, and interviews with those in the field, we will make findings and recommendations to the General Assembly designed to improve mental health services in North Carolina.

State Water Policy – We have now begun research on this three-year project for an in-depth examination of state water policy in North Carolina, including water quantity and quality, inter-basin water transfers from one river basin to another, and how to move from crisis management in times of drought to a long-term state water policy.

Your Ideas

We welcome your suggestions for topics on which the Center's independent, nonpartisan research could make a difference. To make a suggestion, please write us at **P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602**, call us at **(919) 832-2839**, fax to **(919) 832-2847**, or visit our new Website at **www.nccppr.org**. Thank you for caring about improving public policy and enhancing the quality of life in North Carolina.

Our Mission

The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the goals of a better-informed public and a more effective, accountable, and responsive government. The Center identifies public policy issues facing North Carolina and enriches the dialogue among citizens, the media, and policymakers. Based on our research, the Center makes recommendations for improving the way government serves the people of this state.