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Age Spots by Jackie Dover - Making a Difference

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Making a Difference

Missouri has the distinction of being the very first state in the union to have a Silver Haired Legislature (SHL) which was started in 1973. This is a formally elected group of Missouri Senior Citizens 60 years and older who are interested in promoting legislative advocacy for Missouri's older adults. It is patterned after the Missouri General Assembly, comprised of two legislative bodies, the Senate and the House of Representatives. All members are volunteer, serving without pay. However travel and meal expenses are reimbursed.

Here's how it works: There are 10 Area Agency on Aging (AAA) regions in the state of Missouri and each one is represented by three SHL senators and 12 representatives. In May of each year elections are held in the 10 regions of Missouri for the purpose of choosing the SHL legislators to represent their area.

The elected SHL members will meet and discuss proposals that will be written as SHL bills and submitted to the statewide SHL bills committee. This committee will go over all the submissions and choose about 20 for the fall SHL session to consider.

In October of each year the SHL legislators will meet in Jefferson City at the Missouri state capitol to hold a mock legislative session. This session is held in the Senate and House of Representative chambers of the Missouri state capitol, generally lasting 2 – 2 1/2 days.

Committee hearings will be conducted the first day of the session where the SHL senators and representatives will debate and vote for proposals that will be brought to the floor in the house and senate chambers the next day. The following day begins early with transportation to the capitol building and the day's agenda begins. The senators meet in the senate chamber and the representatives meet in the house chamber. Each proposal that was passed out of committee the day before will be debated and a vote will be taken whether to “do pass” or “do not pass”. After each proposal has been decided upon by each chamber the SHL legislators will be transported back to their hotel where they will attend a banquet and have a private meeting with their group of delegates.

The next morning it's back to the capitol where a joint session is held and all the proposals that have been marked “do pass” will be presented to the SHL legislators who will vote on the top five as their priorities for which to advocate with their General Assembly legislators. The state legislators are interested in hearing from the SHL and many of the laws in Missouri have started out as SHL proposals. For example a bill to prevent tax charged on pharmaceuticals, a law that strengthens pre-need funeral regulations and another law that increases Personal Needs Allowance for Medicaid residents in Long-Term Care Facilities. These are just a few of the SHL proposals that became law.

The requirements are that one should be able to travel to Jefferson City and/or Cape Girardeau for meetings. It is beneficial for the elected person to be able to send and receive emails, because when the state legislators are in session things happen quickly and many times you will be contacted on the day of a hearing asking you to contact your state legislator the same day. The other obvious requirement is that one should be interested in the betterment of the lives of Missouri senior citizens.

Elections will be held Tuesday, May 8 at the Senior Nutrition Centers during regular business hours. If you are interested in becoming a SHL delegate you should file a Declaration of Candidacy with Aging Matters, the Southeast Missouri Area Agency on Aging office. This statement must arrive in the office by close of business on April 24. You may obtain an application by contacting our office at 1-800-392-8771 or locally at 335-3331 or pick one up at your local senior center. There are eight seats up for election this year, two Senate seats and six Representative seats. Please consider making a difference in your community by joining the SHL. I would like to thank one of my Silver Haired Legislator members Ruth Dockins for her contributions on this article.

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