

By Sheree Thaxton Vodicka

Our NC Alliance of YMCA's State Advocacy Day was our best yet. More than 50 staff and volunteers arrived in Raleigh energized to thank legislators for the financial support YMCAs have received over the past several years during COVID, and to advocate for continued support of our statewide initiatives in youth development.

We kicked off the morning with Speaker of the House Representative Tim Moore addressing our leaders. Speaker Moore talked about how the Y in his hometown of Kings Mountain has been a stable force for families there. He talked about teen mental health and how important that is, and touched on Medicaid expansion and the ability for North Carolina to draw down federal funds to support our state's residents with greater access to health care.

We then honored Speaker Moore (R) and Rep. Vernetta Alston (D) with our 2023 Mission Forward Awards. These awards recognize elected officials whose work support the YMCA's Mission and Cause. With Speaker Moore's long-time commitment to the Y, nominating Y staff for the NC Child Care Commission as well as covid relief funding, he was clearly a natural choice. Rep. Alston has been a long time YMCA volunteer, and she also supported our Ys during the pandemic by securing funding for Ys in her district.

After our breakfast, we walked to the Legislative Complex to meet with our elected officials, where Y staff and volunteers conducted 61 visits. What made the day even more remarkable was being in the House chamber when the Medicaid expansion bill had returned to the House for concurrence from the Senate. The audience was filled with physicians, physician assistants, and students from across the state as the Representatives voted "yay" to HB67. The next day, they took their final vote and the bill went off to Governor Roy Cooper for signature. It is now signed into law and awaits appropriation in the budget to be implemented.

Medicaid expansion gives our YMCAs more opportunities to serve those insured through the Medicaid program with our evidence-based programs and other services we are providing through our contracts with the Medicaid plans (MCOs) to support their members. Several of the MCOs offer value-added services such as vouchers for youth programs and afterschool programs, and WellCare of North Carolina is providing its Medicaid members with YMCA memberships. **To date, there is nearly \$1 million in membership revenue for our Ys since the launch of this partnership in December.**

We have three YMCAs serving the Medicaid population through the Healthy Opportunities Pilots, supporting families with food boxes, rent and utility assistance, transportation, and diabetes prevention programming. As more residents become eligible and our partnerships with the MCOs expand, I expect to see our opportunities to serve this vulnerable population blossom.