Monthly Directors Report

Department of Social Services
700 E Parker Rd.
Morganton, NC 28655

October 6, 2025

Board of Commissioners
110 N. Green St.
Morganton, NC 28655

Subject: Monthly Update for the Department of Social Services

Dear Board of Commissioners,

Please see below for an executive update on key policies and administrative metrics impacting the Burke County Department of Social Services. This report will be presented to you monthly and will track key performance indicators, policy progression, and identify potential emerging issues.

Thank you for your leadership and support. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

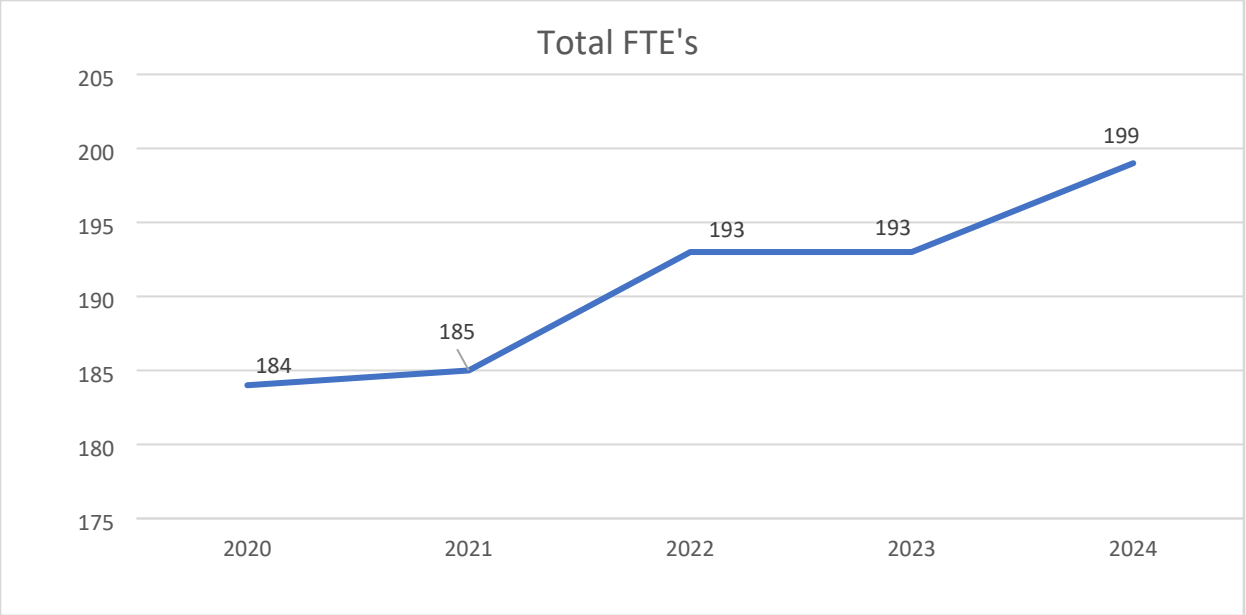
Regards,

Korey Fisher-Wellman
Director of Social Services, Burke County

CC: Brian Epley
County Manager

Personnel Analysis:

The Burke County Department of Social Services has an FTE allocation of 199 positions. This has grown over the past five (5) years – specifically following a staffing analysis completed in 2019 that recommended 44 additional positions. The agency added six (6) FTEs in 2023 following the passing of Medicaid Expansion in December 2023. The county employs 15 part-time employees, including one (1) Income Maintenance Caseworker, one (1) foster care worker who helps with home studies, one (1) CPS social worker who provides support with out-of-county requests, two (2) CPS clerical staff, and 10 after hours placement support specialist who help to provide support when children have to stay overnight at the agency. Recently, DSS has also added 10 additional contract social workers and two (2) contracted social work supervisors to help complete a time-limited CPS project.



Of the 199 active FTEs in the department, we currently have 17 full-time vacancies, which represents an 8.5% vacancy rate. Of those positions, two (2) have a conditional offer. The completion of those hires will reduce our vacancy rate to 7.5%. During the month of August, DSS experienced four (4) separations and had a total of five (5) new hires, all of which were for full-time positions.

Over the past several months, the agency has made meaningful progress in stabilizing the workforce and strengthening staff retention. In collaboration with HR, agency leadership launched a series of initiatives aimed at addressing turnover and enhancing employee support. These efforts began with comprehensive listening sessions led by HR to gather input from staff across all levels. The findings were reviewed by the executive leadership team, HR, and the county manager, resulting in the development of clear leadership expectations in partnership with supervisors. The county manager also engaged directly with staff to reaffirm the county's commitment to a supportive and responsive work environment. To ensure continued responsiveness, the agency has implemented ongoing internal feedback loops and administers regular surveys to gauge employee

satisfaction, identify emerging concerns, and inform future initiatives. Building on this momentum, we have hired both a Training and Onboarding Supervisor, as well as a Quality Assurance Supervisor in Child Welfare. These new roles are designed to strengthen onboarding, provide ongoing training, and lead quality improvement efforts across the division. We believe these investments will have a significant impact not only on performance and practice but also on overall job satisfaction and staff retention.

Open Positions:

Position Title	Position #:	Status
IMC III Leadworker	52045	
IMC III Leadworker	51901	
IMC III	52002	
IMC II	51382	
IMC II	51380	Conditional Offer
IMC II	51820	
PA IV	52047	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51776	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51866	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51434	Conditional Offer
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51438	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51437	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51905	
Social Worker III	51468	
Staff Development Specialist I	51667	

Economic Services Updates:

Update on Federal Medicaid and SNAP Policy Changes — September 2025

Federal Legislative Update: HR 1

In July 2025, Congress passed the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, introducing significant changes to both Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These changes will directly impact program funding, eligibility requirements, and administrative responsibilities in North Carolina, with county-level implications beginning as early as this fall.

Medicaid

- The federal provider tax cap will gradually decrease from 6% to 3.5% by 2031. This change will alter how states, including North Carolina, finance Medicaid services, particularly programs currently supported through state-directed payments.
- New work requirements for adults ages 19–64 will require documentation of at least 80 hours per month of employment, education, or volunteer activity, with limited exemptions.
- Eligibility redeterminations must now be conducted every six (6) months rather than annually, which will increase the frequency of case reviews handled at the county level and add to staff workload.
- Other provisions include adjustments to provider reimbursement rates and restrictions on certain optional benefits.
- Implementation begins October 1, 2025, with reimbursement rate adjustments among the first provisions to take effect.

SNAP

- States with higher payment error rates will be required to share in the cost of benefits beginning October 2027. North Carolina's 2024 error rate of 10.2% places it in the 15% cost-sharing category, which could result in an annual state obligation of approximately $420 million at current enrollment levels.
- Federal cost-sharing for SNAP administration will decrease from 50% to 25%, shifting additional costs to states and counties.
- Expanded work requirements will be phased in, with some existing exemptions reduced or removed.

State & County Implications

- The North Carolina General Assembly will determine how the state addresses the new financial and programmatic requirements, but counties should anticipate increased administrative workload, particularly with Medicaid redeterminations and SNAP error-rate oversight.

- County DSS offices, including ours, will need to prepare for higher caseload demands, more frequent eligibility reviews, and additional documentation and reporting requirements related to work compliance.
- Staffing capacity and state financial support will be critical factors in managing these changes effectively at the local level.

Next Steps

We will continue to monitor implementation closely and provide updates as the state develops guidance and timelines. Counties are also expected to receive more detailed information from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) in the coming months regarding operational and budgetary impacts.

MEDICAID

	AGED OR DISABLED ADULT ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS Does not include MXP or FP cases	ADULT ACTIVE CASES *Does not include MXP or FP cases	FAMILY AND CHILDREN ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS	FAMILY AND CHILDREN ACTIVE CASES	TOTAL MEDICAID APPLICATIONS TAKEN	TOTAL MEDICAID REVIEWS	TOTAL MEDICAID REVIEWS WITHOUT WAIVERS	CAP REFERRALS	LTC REFERRALS	TOTAL MEDICAID RECIPIENTS	TOTAL NEMT TRIPS	REPORT CARD MAD	REPORT CARD OTHER	RECERT COMPLETION TIMELINESS RATE	Straight Through Processing	Total
MOU MEASURE												90	90	95		
AUG	5403	7505	21885	13,942	415	489	1540	4	11	27,288	773	93%	94%		100%	94%
SEP	5384	7609	21,937	13958	382	412	1890	3	17	27,323	626	96%	92%		100%	93%
OCT	5387	7563	22,277	14091	446	90	1128	4	14	27,666	642	96%	92%		100%	93%
NOV	5405	7584	22,655	14304	688	363	1746	9	10	28,062	573	97%	97%		100%	97%
DEC	5415	7567	22936	14554	582	1485	2246	10	11	28,351	582	100%	97%		100%	96%
JAN	5412	7612	23126	14845	565	2090	2900	5	9	28,538	651	96%	96%		100%	96%
FEB	5391	7,608	23436	14,952	352	2223	2580	1	7	28,561	683	93%	95%		100%	95%
MAR	5356	7,618	23247	15,012	411	855	2969	11	13	28603	735	100%	95%		100%	95%
APR	5389	7,752	23481	15,037	380	1571	*	4	12	28,870	683	96%	95%		100%	95%
MAY	5351	7,658	23365	15,147	382	*	*	3	9	28,716	713	93%	97%		100%	97%
JUN	5338	7,683	23515	15,235	346	1540	n/a	0	17	28,851	698	96%	94%		100%	95%
JUL	5327	7,734	23,544	15,333	382	1435	n/a	2	18	28,873	*	93%	95%		100%	95%
AUG	5283	7,753	23448	15,418	325	1386	n/a	1	12	28,731	823	100%	96%		100%	96%

FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES

	ACTIVE RECIPIENTS	ACTIVE CASES	APPLICATIONS TAKEN	APP TIMELINESS RATE- REGULAR	APP TIMELINESS RATE- EXPEDITE	RECERT TIMELINESS RATE	RECERTS COMPLETED	FNS EBT BENEFITS
MOU MEASURE				95%	95%	95%		
AUG	11,155	5792	579	99.53%	95.20%	99.26%	539	1791212
SEP	11,199	5814	525	99.51%	98.26%	98.28%	406	*
OCT	11,503	5975	731/6302	98.54%	94.23%	72.63%	285	3230130
NOV	11,981	6206	394	100.00%	97.81	67%	739	2962954
DEC	12,193	6312	346	97.62%	98.15%	100%	356	2016823
JAN	12,108	6275	585	99.31%	99.77%	100%	525	1,973,378
FEB	11,951	6236	449	97.18%	100%	98.75%	561	1,963,605
MAR	11,907	6183	499	97.21%	100%	98.48%	526	1,965,566
APR	11,396	5959	591	97.24%	100.00%	97.77%	720	1,871,687
MAY	11,002	5732	576	98.11%	99.15%	99.13%	692	1,808,941
JUN	10,804	5,597	598	97.69%	92.73%	98.19%	553	1783246
JUL	10,715	5,556	594	96.83%	96.84%	98.74%	548	1760696
AUG	10,783	5602	558	99.52%	99.31%	98.86%	528	1778789

Social Work Updates

Child Welfare

- 252 active cases in CPS
- 188 Children are experiencing foster care
- 18 young adults in our 18 to 21 program

Training and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Update

Our Training and CQI teams continue to strengthen staff development, improve consistency in practice, and support long-term retention. Their work ensures that new and existing employees have the tools, knowledge, and guidance necessary to provide high-quality services to our community.

Onboarding & Supervisor Partnership

We have enhanced our onboarding process by implementing a structured 30, 60, and 90-day plan for all new staff. This framework ensures that training is paced, intentional, and tied directly to job responsibilities. New employees benefit from coordinated support between trainers and direct supervisors, allowing progress to be tracked and reinforced at every stage. Supervisors play a key role in modeling expectations and providing consistent feedback, which has strengthened collaboration and accountability across the agency.

Training & Retention

A major focus has been equipping staff with the skills needed to use the PATHNC system efficiently. Early training allows new workers to transition more smoothly into carrying a full workload. Beyond system training, the team actively tracks the strengths and needs of staff both within and across supervision teams. This approach allows us to tailor professional development opportunities to meet real-time needs and foster supportive peer relationships. By offering ongoing internal training, we not only build skills but also support retention by investing in staff growth and career development.

Policy & Procedure

Our QA team has made important progress in linking policy to practice. We have developed step-by-step guides and multi-level data tools that support consistent practice across all teams. This reduces errors and helps staff translate policy requirements into effective casework strategies. Regular policy reviews are conducted to identify areas for clarification, strengthen outcomes, and ensure staff have access to practical guidance that connects directly to the day-to-day realities of their roles.

Data Utilization

Finally, the CQI team is advancing our agency's use of data. Clean, timely data is emphasized at every level, ensuring supervisors and staff can make decisions based on accurate information. Data is also being used to identify service trends, monitor funding streams, and ensure compliance with state and federal requirements. Clear reporting tools are being developed for staff, supervisors, and stakeholders, allowing us to maximize resources and maintain transparency.

Summary

Together, our Training and CQI teams are creating a cycle of growth and accountability: staff are supported from their first day, policies are consistently applied in practice, and data is used to improve outcomes and guide decisions. These efforts strengthen our workforce, support retention, and ultimately improve the quality of services we deliver to the families and individuals of our county.

Adult Services Update

The Adult Services Division continues to respond to a high volume of complex and sensitive cases that safeguard the safety, dignity, and well-being of older and disabled adults in our community. Below is a summary of key program activity for the month of July:

Guardianship

We are currently serving 62 adult wards through public guardianship services. Of these, 17 are managed by contracted providers, allowing us to extend our capacity and ensure proper oversight for individuals who have been deemed legally incompetent and require court-appointed protection. In July, we received three new guardianship referrals, reflecting sustained demand in this area.

Special Assistance In-Home (SAIH)

We are serving 53 clients through the SAIH program, significantly exceeding the state-recommended caseload of 25 to 30 per social worker. This caseload is currently being managed by one SAIH social worker, highlighting the program's high demand and the strain on available staffing resources. SAIH remains essential in helping individuals with limited income remain safely in their homes and avoid institutionalization.

Community Alternatives Program for Disabled Adults (CAP/DA)

As of the end of August, 137 individuals are actively enrolled in CAP/DA services, with a capacity to serve up to 188 or more, depending on the speed of state-level referral processing. CAP/DA plays a vital role in supporting individuals who might otherwise require nursing home placement, enabling them to remain safe in their homes while receiving necessary care and support.

Adult Protective Services (APS)

In August, we received 26 new APS reports, of which 14 were screened in for formal investigation. The outcomes of these investigations included:

- 3 substantiated cases (confirmed abuse, neglect, or exploitation),
- 6 cases opened for ongoing protective services

In addition to investigations, APS staff also conducted nine (9) outreach assessments, made 12 service referrals, and handled six (6) guardianship referrals connected to adult protection concerns. These figures highlight both the vulnerability of adults in our county and the essential work our team does daily to assess risk, coordinate services, and intervene when necessary.

Conclusion

This month's data underscores the growing demand and complexity across all areas of adult services. Continued pressure on programs like SAIH, guardianship, and APS reinforces the importance of sustained investment in staffing, training, and infrastructure to ensure that we can effectively protect and support some of the most vulnerable members of our community.