Department of Social Services
Monthly Directors Report

March 2, 2026

Board of Commissioners
P.O. Box 219
Morganton, NC 28680

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.

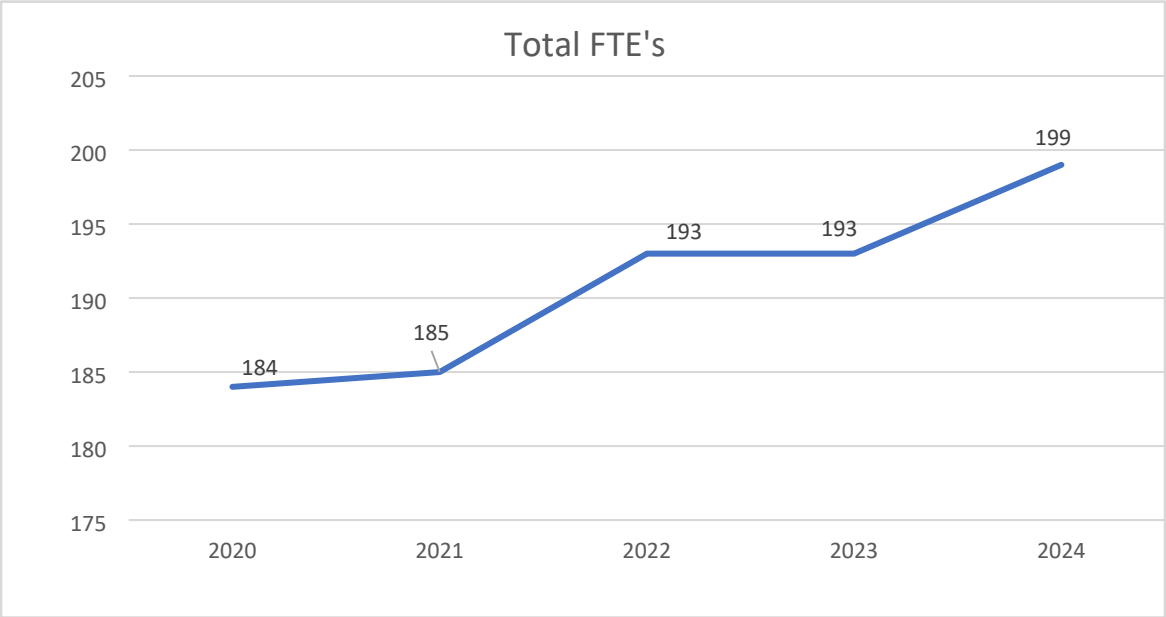
Thank you for your leadership and support. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

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 several years, specifically following a staffing analysis completed in 2019 that recommended 44 additional positions. The agency added 6 FTEs in 2023 following the passing of Medicaid Expansion in December 2023. The county employs 15 part time employees, including one Income Maintenance Caseworker, 1 foster care worker who helps with home studies, 1 CPS social worker who provides support with out-of-county requests, 2 cps clerical staff, and 10 after hours placement support specialist who help to provide support when children are in the building overnight.



Of the 199 active FTEs in the department, currently, we have 14 full time vacancies – which represents 7% vacancy rate. During the month of January, DSS experienced **8** separations, and had a total of **5** new hires, all of which were for full-time positions.

Over the past several months, the agency has continued to make measurable progress in stabilizing the Child Welfare workforce and strengthening overall staff retention. Through close collaboration with Human Resources, agency leadership has implemented targeted initiatives focused on reducing turnover, enhancing onboarding processes, and improving employee support systems.

Two critical Child Welfare leadership positions — a Training and Onboarding Supervisor and a Quality Assurance Supervisor — have now been fully integrated into operations. These roles are already contributing to a more structured onboarding experience for new staff, providing consistent and division-wide training opportunities, and reinforcing continuous quality improvement efforts. Early indicators reflect improved new hire engagement and increased supervisory support, positioning the division for stronger long-term workforce stability and improved practice outcomes.

The agency's enhanced recruitment strategy for experienced Child Welfare professionals remains in place and continues to yield positive results. The targeted sign-on bonus for applicants with at

least one year of directly related DSS experience who do not require pre-service training has allowed us to fill some frontline vacancies more efficiently. This approach reduces onboarding timelines, limits service disruption, and lowers training-related costs while strengthening the experience level of the workforce.

To further address workload demands and staffing pressures, the agency strategically realigned internal resources. Three positions were reclassified to better meet operational needs, resulting in:

- The creation of an additional CPS Social Worker position,
- The addition of a CPS Supervisor position to enhance supervisory coverage and staff support, and
- The establishment of a Visitation Coach role within Foster Care to strengthen visitation quality and support permanency efforts.

These structural adjustments have improved supervisory ratios, increased frontline capacity, and enhanced support for children and families involved in foster care services.

While Child Welfare staffing trends have stabilized, the agency has recently experienced increased turnover within Economic Services. This shift is largely attributable to heightened workload demands and expanded administrative requirements following the passage of HR 1, which significantly increased documentation, verification, and compliance standards within Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services programs. These additional federal and state oversight measures have created greater processing complexity and increased pressure on frontline eligibility staff.

Agency leadership is actively monitoring staffing levels, caseload ratios, and processing timeliness in Economic Services. Collectively, these efforts represent a comprehensive, data-informed workforce stabilization strategy centered on targeted recruitment, strengthened training and onboarding systems, strategic restructuring, and enhanced supervisory infrastructure. Agency leadership remains committed to closely tracking staffing trends, workload pressures, and service demands across all divisions to ensure continued progress in performance outcomes, practice quality, employee engagement, and long-term retention.

Open Positions:

Position Title	Position #:	Status
IMC III Lead worker	51769	
IMC III	51385	
IMC II	51382	
IMC II	51823	
IMC II	51898	
IMC II	51785	

IMC II	51783	
IMC II	51379	
Social Worker IAT	51436	
Social Worker IAT	51438	
Social Worker IAT	51775	
Social Worker IAT	51907	
Social Worker III	51467	
Administrative Officer II	51667	

Economic Services Updates:

Update on Federal Medicaid and SNAP Policy Changes

The agency continues to monitor and respond to significant federal changes to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enacted under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (HR1) in July 2025. Several provisions are now in effect, with additional changes phasing in over the next several years. These reforms introduce increased administrative requirements, higher workload demands, and potential long-term fiscal implications for state and county governments.

Medicaid Impacts

Key Medicaid changes include:

- A reduction in the allowable provider tax cap from 6% to 3.5% by 2031, affecting statewide program financing.
- New federal work requirements for adults ages 19–64, requiring verification of at least 80 hours per month of qualifying activity.
- A shift to six-month eligibility redeterminations rather than annual reviews, effectively doubling the review cycle for counties.

Together, these changes significantly increase eligibility verification, documentation, and compliance monitoring responsibilities for county staff.

SNAP Impacts

HR1 also introduces major SNAP changes, including:

- Beginning in 2027, states with higher payment error rates must share in benefit costs. Based on current rates, North Carolina would fall into the 15% cost-sharing tier, with an estimated statewide impact of approximately $420 million annually.
- A reduction in the federal share of SNAP administrative funding from 50% to 25%.

- Expanded work requirements and fewer exemptions, increasing case complexity and monitoring requirements.

Local Implications

Locally, staff are experiencing increased time demands related to verification, documentation, and client education. The shift to six-month Medicaid redeterminations represents a sustained structural increase in eligibility workload. Additionally, reduced federal administrative funding for SNAP may result in greater fiscal pressure at the state and county levels over time.

Agency leadership continues to monitor federal guidance, state implementation plans, workload data, and potential fiscal impacts to ensure compliance while maintaining service continuity for Burke County residents.

MEDICAID

											MOU MEASURE	90	90	95			
	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
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%
SEP	5289	7,744	23471	15,459	378	1586	n/a	2	16	28,740	756	100%	94%		100%	94%
OCT	5311	7,747	23422	16,290	398	1606	n/a	1	16	28,733	638	100%	98%		100%	98%
NOV	5342	7,755	23,381	15,465	472	1825		2	12	28,723	624	100%	96%		100%	97%
DEC	5313	7,761	23,324	15,542	560	1890		3	15	28,637	832	100%	95%		100%	96%
JAN	5319	7,748	23194	15,527	531	503		2	19	28,513	606	100%	93%		100%	93%

FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES

			MOU MEASURE	95%	95%	95%		
	ACTIVE RECIPIENTS	ACTIVE CASES	APPLICATIONS TAKEN	APP TIMELINESS RATE- REGULAR	APP TIMELINESS RATE- EXPEDITE	RECERT TIMELINESS RATE	RECERTS COMPLETED	FNS EBT BENEFITS
JAN	12,108	6275	585	99.31%	99.77%	100%	525	1,973,378.00
FEB	11,951	6236	449	97.18%	100%	98.75%	561	1,963,605.00
MAR	11,907	6183	499	97.21%	100%	98.48%	526	1,965,566.00
APR	11,396	5959	591	97.24%	100.00%	97.77%	720	1,871,687.00
MAY	11,002	5732	576	98.11%	99.15%	99.13%	692	1,808,941.00
JUN	10,804	5,597	598	97.69%	92.73%	98.19%	553	1,783,246.00
JUL	10,715	5,556	594	96.83%	96.84%	98.74%	548	1,760,696.00
AUG	10,783	5602	558	99.52%	99.31%	98.86%	528	1,778,789.00
SEP	10,794	5605	580	99.13%	97.98%	99.41%	509	1,752,253.00
OCT	10,695	5568	512	99..07%	99.02%	98.65%	445	1,797,705.00
NOV	10,418	5445	417	99.15%	98.81%	99.70%	336	1,759,731.00
DEC	10,269	5389	479	100.00%	100%	99.36%	336	1,721,688.20
JAN	10,112	5307	505	96%	99.09%	97.51%	482	1,662,857.00

Social Work Updates

Child Welfare
233 active cases in CPS
33 active Family In-Home cases
197 Children experiencing foster care
- 9 entries into foster care during October
- 4 exits

18 young adults in our 18 to 21 program

PATH NC Transition and Legacy CPS Case Cleanup
The Department of Social Services continues to actively prepare for the agency's transition later this year to PATH NC for Child Welfare In-Home Services, Permanency Planning, and Financials. This statewide modernization effort will replace legacy systems with a more integrated, standardized, and data-driven platform designed to improve documentation, tracking, reporting, and overall case management across North Carolina.

PATH NC is intended to strengthen practice consistency, enhance data accuracy, and improve continuity as cases move between program areas. By better aligning technology with child welfare practice, the system is expected to support stronger decision-making, improved accountability, and better outcomes for children and families.

In preparation for implementation, DSS leadership and staff are engaged in ongoing planning and readiness activities. These efforts include reviewing workflows, identifying necessary process adjustments, coordinating with state partners regarding system functionality, and developing division-specific training plans. Special focus remains on frontline In-Home Services, Permanency Planning staff, and fiscal staff responsible for child welfare financial operations.

A significant component of transition readiness includes intensive efforts to review and close out legacy CPS cases. Staff have been conducting detailed case audits to ensure that older cases are properly documented, brought into compliance, and formally closed when appropriate. This work improves data integrity, reduces system clutter prior to migration, and ensures that only accurate, active cases transition into PATH NC. While time-intensive, this cleanup effort strengthens overall case quality and positions the agency for a smoother system conversion.

The agency is working closely with Training and Quality Assurance to ensure staff are supported before, during, and after implementation. Leadership remains focused on minimizing service disruption, maintaining compliance, and ensuring data accuracy throughout the transition process.

Although implementation requires a significant investment of time and operational focus, the transition to PATH NC represents an important step toward modernizing child welfare operations and strengthening statewide consistency. Agency leadership will continue to monitor readiness progress and provide updates to the Board as implementation approaches.

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.

Guardianship
We are currently serving 67 adult wards through public guardianship services. An additional 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 January, we received 2 new guardianship referrals, reflecting sustained demand in this area.

Special Assistance In-Home (SAIH)
We are serving 56 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 December, 133 individuals are actively enrolled in CAP/DA services, with 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 January we received 20 new APS reports, of which 12 were screened in for formal investigation. The outcomes of these investigations included:

- 0 substantiated cases (confirmed abuse, neglect, or exploitation)
- 11 cases opened for ongoing protective services.

In addition to investigations, APS staff also conducted 3 outreach assessments, made 15 service referrals, and handled 2 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.