JEFFREY C. BRITTAIN, CHAIR
PHIL SMITH, VICE CHAIR
RANDY BURNS, COMMISSIONER
BRIAN BARRIER, COMMISSIONER
MIKE STROUD, COMMISSIONER

BURKECOUNTY
ALL ABOUT ADVANCING

BRIAN EPLEY, COUNTY MANAGER
KAT WRIGHT, INTERIM CLERK TO THE BOARD
DESTIN HALL, COUNTY ATTORNEY
KANIA LAW FIRM, P.A., TAX ATTORNEY

# Monthly Directors Report

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

**May 4, 2026**
**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.

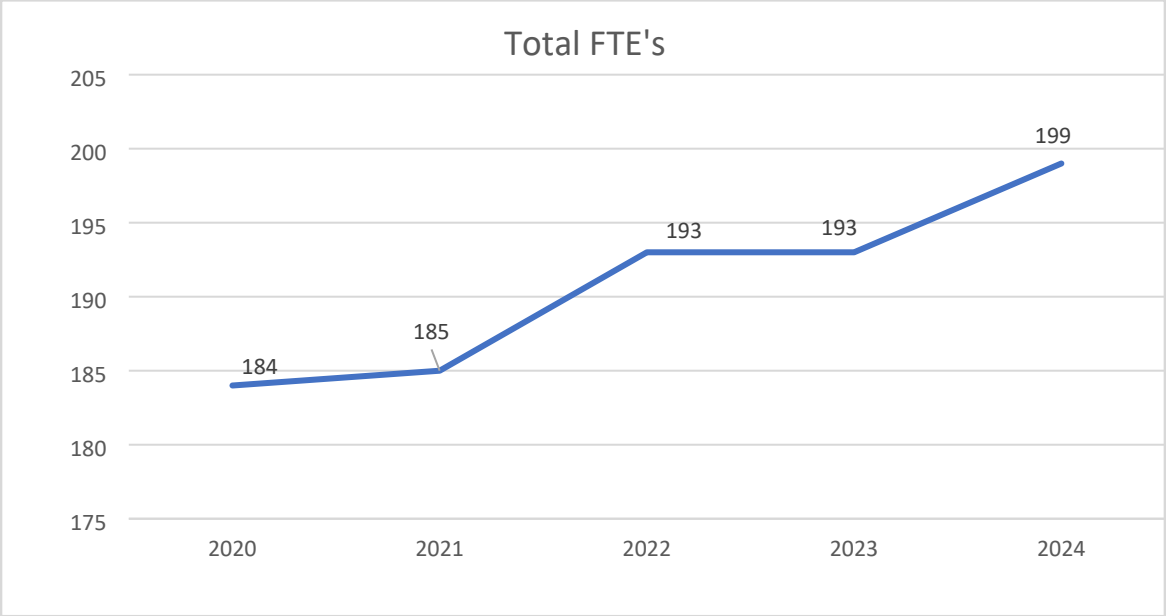
Regards,

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 several years, specifically following a staffing analysis completed in 2019 that recommended 44 additional positions. The agency added 6 FTEs in December of 2023 following the passing of Medicaid Expansion. 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 10 full time vacancies – which represents 5% vacancy rate. During the month of February, DSS experienced 3 separations, and had a total of 9 new hires, 8 of which were for full-time positions.

Over the past several months, the agency has continued to build on earlier workforce stabilization efforts, with sustained progress in Child Welfare staffing, onboarding, and supervisory support. Strategic investments in workforce infrastructure are beginning to show measurable impact in both employee engagement and operational consistency.

The Training and Onboarding Supervisor and Quality Assurance Supervisor roles are now fully operational and increasingly embedded in daily practice. These positions have strengthened the agency's ability to deliver consistent onboarding experiences, provide structured and ongoing training opportunities, and support a more standardized approach to practice oversight. As a result, new staff are demonstrating improved readiness for casework responsibilities, and supervisors are better equipped to provide timely coaching and support.

Recruitment efforts targeting experienced Child Welfare professionals continue to produce positive outcomes. The sign-on incentive for candidates with prior DSS experience remains an effective tool in attracting qualified applicants who can transition more quickly into active

caseloads. This approach has contributed to reduced vacancy durations, minimized service disruption, and enhanced overall team experience levels.

Recent structural adjustments within Child Welfare have also begun to yield benefits. The addition of a CPS Social Worker, CPS Supervisor, and Visitation Coach has improved supervisory ratios, increased frontline capacity, and strengthened the quality and consistency of visitation practices. These enhancements are supporting more timely case progression and reinforcing permanency-focused work with children and families.

While Child Welfare staffing has stabilized, Economic Services continues to experience increased strain due to workforce turnover and sustained workload pressures. The implementation of expanded federal and state requirements associated with HR 1 has significantly increased the complexity of eligibility determination processes within Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services. These changes have resulted in higher documentation standards, increased verification requirements, and longer processing times, placing additional demands on frontline staff.

In response, agency leadership is actively evaluating workload distribution, staffing alignment, and process efficiencies within Economic Services. Efforts are underway to identify opportunities for targeted support, including enhanced training, workflow adjustments, and potential resource reallocation to maintain service timeliness and accuracy.

Overall, the agency's approach remains focused on a comprehensive, data-informed workforce strategy that emphasizes targeted recruitment, strengthened onboarding and training systems, strategic resource alignment, and enhanced supervisory support. Leadership will continue to closely monitor staffing trends, caseload dynamics, and performance indicators across all divisions to ensure sustained progress in service delivery, employee retention, and practice quality.

**Open Positions:**

| Position Title | Position #: | Status |
|---|---|---|
| IMC III Lead worker | 51769 | |
| IMC II | 51783 | |
| IMC II | 51403 | |
| IMC II | 51375 | |
| Part Time Social Worker IAT | 52080 | |
| Social Worker IAT | 51905 | |
| Social Worker IAT | 51436 | |
| Social Worker IAT | 51438 | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Social Worker IAT | 51441 | |
| Social Worker IAT | 51444 | |
| Social Worker III | 52013 | |

## Economic Services Updates:

The agency continues to actively monitor and respond to ongoing federal changes to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enacted under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (HR1) in July 2025. Since the initial implementation phases began, additional federal and state guidance has been released, and several provisions are now moving from planning into early execution at the county level. These changes continue to drive increased administrative complexity, higher workload demands, and potential long-term fiscal implications.

**Medicaid Impacts**
Implementation planning for Medicaid-related provisions is advancing, with early operational impacts already being felt in eligibility functions. Key changes include:

- The phased reduction of the allowable provider tax cap from 6% to 3.5% by 2031, which will continue to influence statewide Medicaid financing strategies.
- Upcoming federal work requirements for adults ages 19–64, including verification of at least 80 hours per month of qualifying activity. While full implementation is pending, preparatory work is underway to establish tracking and verification processes.
- Transition planning for six-month eligibility redeterminations, which will significantly increase the frequency of case reviews and associated workload for county staff.

In anticipation of these changes, staff are already adjusting to increased documentation expectations and more complex case management requirements. System updates and policy guidance from the state are ongoing, requiring continuous adaptation at the local level.

**SNAP Impacts**
SNAP-related provisions under HR1 are also progressing, with states and counties preparing for both operational and fiscal changes. Key components include:

- The introduction of state cost-sharing for benefits beginning in 2027, with North Carolina currently projected to fall within the 15% contribution tier based on existing payment error rates.
- A reduction in the federal share of SNAP administrative funding from 50% to 25%, which is expected to create additional budgetary pressure over time.
- Expanded work requirements and reduced exemptions, increasing the complexity of eligibility determinations and ongoing case management responsibilities.

Although some SNAP provisions have later effective dates, preparatory efforts and policy alignment are already contributing to increased workload and training needs for staff.

## Local Implications

At the local level, these combined changes are resulting in sustained increases in staff workload, particularly in the areas of verification, documentation, and client communication. Staff are spending additional time ensuring compliance with evolving requirements while continuing to maintain timeliness standards for service delivery.

The anticipated shift to more frequent Medicaid redeterminations represents a significant structural change that will require ongoing staffing and workflow adjustments. Additionally, the projected reduction in federal administrative funding for SNAP presents a longer-term fiscal concern that may impact resource allocation decisions at both the state and county levels.

Agency leadership remains actively engaged in monitoring federal guidance, state implementation timelines, and local workload data. Efforts are focused on maintaining compliance, supporting staff through these transitions, and ensuring continued access to essential services for Burke County residents.

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 | | |
| 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% |
| FEB | 5318 | 7,781 | 23123 | 15,439 | 405 | 1893 | | 2 | 10 | 28,441 | 809 | 100% | 87% | | 100% | 88%waiver |
| MAR | * | 7,826 | * | 15,420 | 504 | 1767 | | 3 | 11 | 28,446 | 933 | 90% | 94% | * | 100% | 94% |

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% | | |
| 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 |
| FEB | 9,992 | 5228 | 542 | 100.00% | 98.15% | 98.15% | 432 | 1,645,153.00 |
| MAR | 9,889 | 5197 | 543 | 98.45% | 99.28% | 99.21% | 505 | 1,647,954.00 |

## Social Work Updates

**Child Welfare-March**
191 active cases in CPS
38 active Family In-Home cases
203 Children experiencing foster care

- 11 entries into foster care during March
- 7 exits

23 young adults in our 18 to 21 program

## Social Work Appreciation Month – March 2026

Throughout the month of March, the agency proudly recognized Social Work Appreciation Month as an opportunity to honor the dedication, professionalism, and impact of our social work staff. This year's efforts focused on intentional recognition, staff engagement, and reinforcing the value of the work being done each day on behalf of the children, families, and individuals we serve.

The agency implemented a series of weekly appreciation activities designed to highlight the contributions of staff across all program areas. Internal communications featured employee spotlights and messages of gratitude that recognized both individual accomplishments and the collective impact of the workforce. These efforts helped elevate the visibility of social work practice within the agency and reinforced a culture of appreciation.

A staff appreciation luncheon was held to provide an opportunity for employees to connect, reflect, and celebrate their shared commitment to service. In addition, small tokens of appreciation were distributed to staff as a tangible acknowledgment of their continued dedication and resilience in a demanding field.

Leadership also partnered with community stakeholders to share messages of support and appreciation, further emphasizing the critical role social workers play in strengthening the community. Throughout the month, supervisors and peers were encouraged to engage in intentional recognition, fostering a supportive environment and promoting team cohesion.

These efforts were well received and contributed to positive staff morale, increased engagement, and a renewed sense of pride in the work. The agency remains committed to continuing recognition efforts beyond the month of March as part of a broader strategy to support employee well-being, retention, and organizational culture.

## 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 74 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 March, we received 3 new guardianship referrals, reflecting sustained demand in this area.

**Special Assistance In-Home (SAIH)**
We are serving 60 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 March, 132 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 March we received 36 new APS reports, of which 13 were screened in for formal investigation. The outcomes of these investigations included:

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

In addition to investigations, APS staff also conducted 12outreach assessments, made 12 service referrals, and handled 3 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.