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Monthly Directors Report

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

September 8, 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.

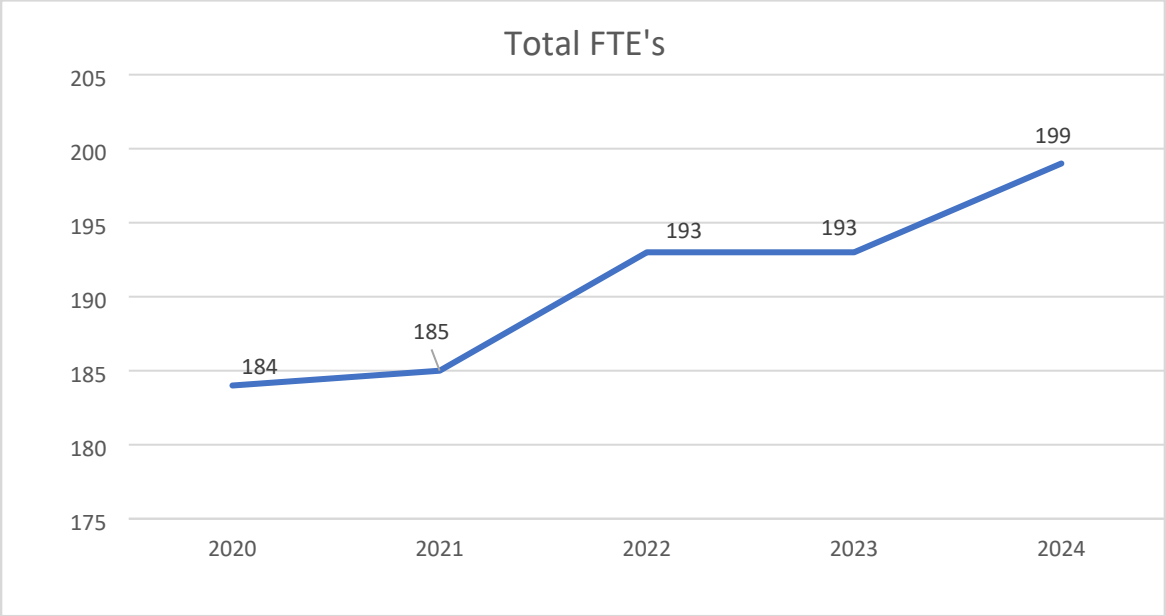
Regards,

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 22 part time employees, including 3 Income Maintenance Caseworker, 3 foster care workers who help with home studies and out of county visits, 2 CPS social worker who provides support with out-of-county requests, 1 part time finance staff member who helps support the finance team, 2 cps clerical staff, and 11 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 17 full time vacancies – which represents 8.5% vacancy rate. During the month of July, DSS experienced 3 separations, and had a total of 1 new hire, which was for a full-time position.

Burke County DSS continues to strengthen its workforce through strategic recruitment, employee development, and retention initiatives designed to ensure high-quality services for the citizens of Burke County. Investments made over the past year in workforce infrastructure continue to improve staff readiness, enhance consistency in service delivery, and support long-term workforce stability.

The Training and Onboarding Supervisor and Quality Assurance Supervisor remain integral to these efforts by providing structured onboarding, ongoing training, coaching, and practice oversight. Their work continues to strengthen new employee orientation, expand professional development opportunities, and provide supervisors with additional tools to support staff performance and reinforce quality practice standards.

Burke County DSS continues to actively engage local colleges and universities to develop a sustainable pipeline of future employees. Through student internships, career fairs, classroom

presentations, and other workforce outreach activities, the department is working to increase awareness of careers in public service and social work and establish relationships with students before graduation. These partnerships remain an important component of the department's long-term recruitment strategy and efforts to attract qualified professionals to Burke County.

Recruitment within Child Welfare remains a priority, with the department continuing to recruit qualified professionals and utilize sign-on incentives for experienced candidates filling CPS and Foster Care Social Worker positions. These efforts have strengthened the department's ability to attract experienced practitioners in a competitive workforce environment and support continued staffing stability.

The department is also evaluating the structure and role of Economic Services training staff to provide greater support to frontline employees as they implement significant changes in federal and state policy. This restructuring is intended to increase the department's capacity to provide timely policy guidance, targeted training, coaching, and technical assistance while helping staff navigate increasingly complex eligibility and verification requirements. The goal is to improve consistency, reduce uncertainty for staff, and ensure changes in policy are implemented accurately and efficiently.

Structural enhancements within Child Welfare, including the addition of a CPS Social Worker, CPS Supervisor, and Visitation Coach, continue to strengthen supervisory support, increase frontline capacity, improve visitation practices, and promote timely permanency planning for children and families.

While Child Welfare staffing issues have remained fairly consistent, Economic Services continues to manage significant operational demands associated with ongoing policy changes, including new federal requirements resulting from HR 1. Expanded verification requirements, increased documentation standards, and additional eligibility determination responsibilities for Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services continue to increase the complexity of program administration. The department remains focused on strengthening training and operational support, evaluating workflow efficiencies, and ensuring Burke County residents continue to receive timely, accurate, and responsive services.

Open Positions:

Position Title	Position #:	Status
IMC II	51403	
IMC II	51395	
IMC III Leadworker	51769	
IMC II	51375	
IMC III Leadworker	51367	
IMC II	51381	
IMC II	51380	
IMC II	51363	
IMC II	51767	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51441	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51776	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51778	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51905	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51906	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51866	
SOCIAL WORKER III	51461	
SOCIAL WORKER III	51460	

Economic Services Updates

Federal Policy Update: Medicaid and SNAP (HR 1) Implementation

Burke County DSS continues to monitor and prepare for the implementation of federal changes to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enacted through the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (HR 1). As federal agencies and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services continue to release implementation guidance, the department is assessing operational impacts and preparing staff for changes that will increase eligibility, verification, documentation, and case management responsibilities.

Medicaid

Planning continues for several Medicaid provisions that will significantly impact eligibility administration and frontline operations. The department is preparing for:

- Implementation of federal community engagement requirements for certain adults, including the need to verify qualifying employment, education, or other approved activities.
- More frequent Medicaid eligibility renewals, which will increase the volume of eligibility reviews, client contacts, and case actions.
- Continued NC FAST system and policy changes as NCDHHS develops processes to support implementation.
- Long-term Medicaid financing changes, including the phased reduction of the allowable provider tax cap through 2031.

These changes will require increased staff training, verification, documentation, and ongoing communication with applicants and recipients.

SNAP

Economic Services is also preparing for significant changes to the Food and Nutrition Services Program, including expanded work requirements and revised exemption criteria. These changes are expected to increase the complexity of eligibility determinations and ongoing case management.

The department continues to monitor federal guidance regarding implementation timelines, including provisions that will result in greater state financial responsibility for SNAP benefits and administrative costs. The potential fiscal impact to North Carolina reinforces the importance of maintaining program accuracy and meeting federal performance standards.

Local Operational Impact

The cumulative impact of these policy changes continues to place significant demands on Economic Services staff. Employees are managing increased verification requirements, policy changes, system updates, training needs, and client communication while continuing to meet federally mandated timeliness and accuracy standards.

In response, Burke County DSS is evaluating the structure of its Economic Services training function to provide greater support to frontline staff as these changes are implemented. The department is exploring ways to strengthen policy training, provide more timely technical assistance, and improve communication between training staff, supervisors, and frontline employees. These efforts are intended to help staff more effectively navigate complex policy changes while promoting consistency and accuracy in service delivery.

Agency leadership continues to work closely with NCDHHS, the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services, and county partners to monitor implementation, assess operational impacts, and identify opportunities to improve efficiency. As additional federal and state guidance becomes available, Burke County DSS will continue to adjust its operations and

training strategies to ensure compliance while maintaining timely, accurate, and customer-focused services 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
JUL	5327	7,734	23,544	15,333	382	1435		2	18	28,873	*	93%	95%		100%	95%
AUG	5283	7,753	23448	15,418	325	1386		1	12	28,731	823	100%	96%		100%	96%
SEP	5289	7,744	23471	15,459	378	1586		2	16	28,740	756	100%	94%		100%	94%
OCT	5311	7,747	23422	16,290	398	1606		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%wa
MAR	*	7,826	*	15,420	504	1767		3	11	28,446	933	90%	94%	*	100%	94%
APR	5368	7,836	22876	15,301	413	1651		5	20	28,246	849	92%	95%	*	100%	94%
MAY	5369	7,791	22750	15,224	456	1423		2	15	28,121	910	100%	94%	*	100%	94%
JUN	5389	7,770	22532	15,170	461	1337		2	10	27,925	986	100%	95%	*	100%	95%
JUL	5387	7,798	22,596	15,136	467	1239		0	20	27,923	975	100%	95%	*	100%	95%

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
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
APR	9,805	5142	500	99.45%	97.98%	99.49%	587	1,618,144.00
MAY	9,754	5091	540	100.00%	100.00%	99.00%	564	1,645,145.00
JUN	9,735	5,082	572	98.59%	98.98%	98.01%	569	1,635,049.00
JUL	9,792	5,131	524	99.14%	99.07%	99.36%	467	1,651,828.00

Social Work Updates

Child Welfare

135 active cases in CPS
31 active Family In-Home cases
214 Children experiencing foster care

- 11 entries into foster care during July
- 12 exits

21 young adults in our 18 to 21 program

Child Welfare Update

Child Welfare continues to strengthen its workforce through focused recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and employee development initiatives. Recruitment remains active for Child Protective Services and Foster Care positions, with sign-on incentives continuing to be offered to experienced social workers. These efforts have supported improved staffing stability and the department's ability to maintain continuity of services while responding to the ongoing needs of children and families.

The department continues to strengthen its workforce pipeline through partnerships with local colleges and universities. Staff are participating in career fairs, classroom presentations, student internships, and other outreach opportunities designed to introduce students to careers in child welfare and public service. These partnerships are an important component of the department's long-term strategy to develop and recruit qualified professionals.

Newly hired staff continue to receive structured onboarding, comprehensive training, and ongoing coaching. The Training and Onboarding Supervisor and Quality Assurance Supervisor remain instrumental in strengthening employee readiness, promoting consistency in practice, and providing supervisors and frontline staff with additional support and resources.

CPS leadership and frontline staff continue to make progress in managing assessments and investigations. Focused case management, increased supervisory oversight, and the continued dedication of staff have supported improved workload management while allowing the division to respond to reports of abuse, neglect, and dependency in a timely manner. Maintaining this progress remains a priority as the department works to balance increasing service demands with available workforce capacity.

Foster care placement capacity continues to be a significant challenge. Limited availability of licensed foster homes and appropriate residential treatment placements remains an issue locally and statewide. Burke County DSS continues to work with state partners, private providers, and community organizations to identify safe and appropriate placements while pursuing opportunities to expand local placement resources and strengthen the continuum of care available to children and families.

Burke County DSS is also moving forward with the Every Child Matters initiative in partnership with Black Mountain Children's Home and Anuvia Prevention and Recovery. This collaboration is focused on strengthening the local continuum of care by expanding access to prevention services, behavioral health supports, substance use treatment resources, and family-focused interventions. The partnership is intended to provide additional supports to families involved with Child Welfare, with the goal of preventing deeper system involvement, supporting reunification, and improving outcomes for children and caregivers.

The department is also preparing for the implementation of PATH NC, North Carolina's new statewide child welfare information system. Burke County remains scheduled to transition to PATH NC on September 8, 2026. Staff have participated in extensive training, data validation, workflow planning, and implementation readiness activities in preparation for the transition. Agency leadership continues to work closely with the North Carolina Department of Health and

Human Services to address implementation needs and ensure staff are prepared while maintaining continuity of services.

As the September implementation date approaches, PATH NC represents one of the most significant operational changes facing Child Welfare this year. While the transition will require substantial staff preparation and adjustment, the new system is expected to modernize child welfare case management, improve data quality, and provide enhanced tools to support safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. Burke County DSS remains focused on a successful transition while continuing to prioritize the safety and needs of children and families.

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 81 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 July, we received 6 new guardianship referrals, reflecting sustained demand in this area.

Special Assistance In-Home (SAIH)
We are serving 67 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 July, 122 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 July we received 38 new APS reports, of which 17 were screened in for formal investigation. In addition to investigations, APS staff also conducted 8 outreach assessments, made 17 service referrals, and handled 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.