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Monthly Directors Report

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

July 20, 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.

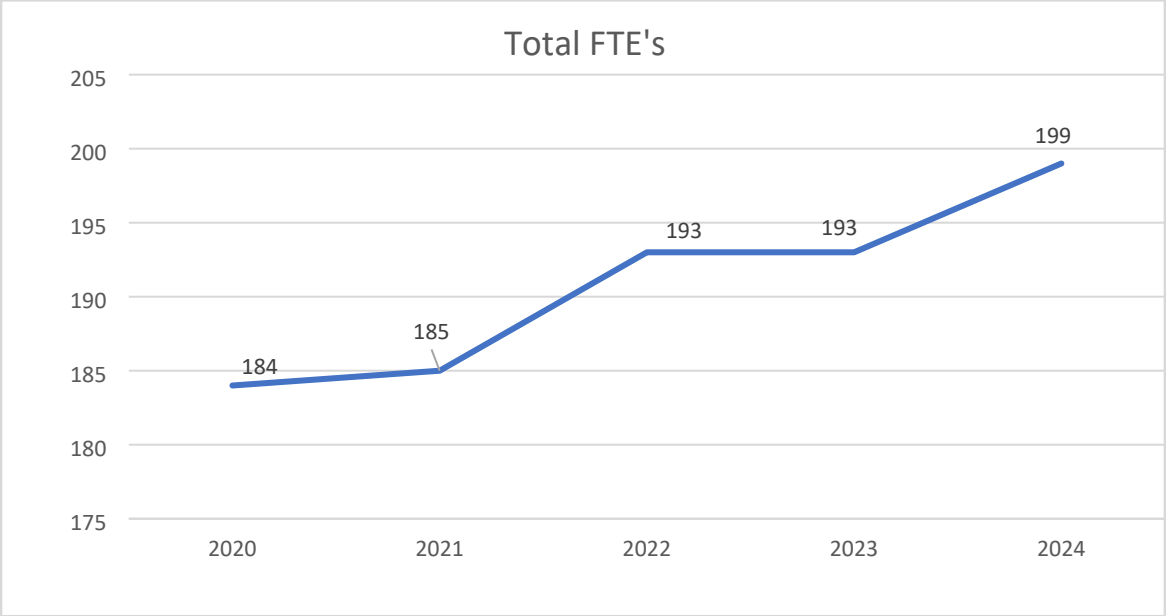
Regards,

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 16 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 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 12 full time vacancies – which represents 6% vacancy rate. During the month of May, DSS experienced 5 separations, and had a total of 6 new hires, all of which were for full-time positions.

Burke County DSS continues to make meaningful progress in strengthening its workforce through targeted recruitment, onboarding, and employee development initiatives. Investments made over the past year in workforce infrastructure are contributing to improved staff readiness, increased retention, and greater operational consistency across the department.

The Training and Onboarding Supervisor and Quality Assurance Supervisor continue to play a critical role in supporting employee success by providing structured onboarding, ongoing training, coaching, and practice oversight. These efforts have enhanced the consistency of new employee orientation while providing supervisors with additional tools to support staff development and reinforce quality practice standards.

Recruitment efforts within Child Welfare continue to yield positive results. The department has maintained improved staffing levels through focused recruitment strategies, including the continued use of a sign-on incentive for experienced Child Welfare professionals. These efforts

have reduced vacancies, strengthened frontline experience, and improved the department's ability to maintain continuity of services for children and families.

The department also remains committed to building a sustainable workforce pipeline through partnerships with local colleges and universities. DSS continues to participate in internship opportunities, career fairs, classroom presentations, and other outreach activities designed to promote careers in public service and social work while encouraging students to pursue employment opportunities within Burke County following graduation.

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

While Child Welfare staffing has remained stable, Economic Services continues to experience significant workload pressures as staff implement new federal requirements associated with HR 1. Expanded verification requirements, increased documentation standards, and additional eligibility determination responsibilities for Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services have substantially increased the administrative complexity of program operations. The department continues to monitor the operational impact of these changes while evaluating staffing needs and process improvements to ensure continued delivery of timely and accurate benefits to Burke County residents.

Open Positions:

Position Titl2	
IMC II	51783
IMC II	51403
IMC II	51649
IMC II	51395
IMC III Leadworker	51769
IMC II	51375
IMC III Leadworker	51367
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51778
SOCIAL WORKER III	51466
SOCIAL WORKER III	51468

PROCESSING ASST IV	51400
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51905

Economic Services Updates

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

Burke County DSS continues to monitor and implement federal changes to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enacted through the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (HR 1). Throughout the past year, federal agencies and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services have released additional guidance on several provisions, while other components remain under development. Although many implementation timelines extend over the next several years, preparation and operational planning are already creating significant impacts on county operations.

Medicaid

Implementation activities continue for several Medicaid provisions that will substantially increase eligibility administration and case management responsibilities.

Key changes include:

- Continued planning for federal community engagement (work) requirements for certain adults, which will require counties to verify qualifying work, education, or other approved activities once implemented.
- Preparation for more frequent Medicaid eligibility renewals, increasing the number of case reviews, client contacts, and eligibility determinations completed each year.
- Ongoing state system modifications and policy development to support implementation of new federal requirements.
- Continued monitoring of long-term Medicaid financing changes, including the phased reduction of the allowable provider tax cap through 2031.

These changes will significantly increase verification requirements, documentation standards, and staff workload while requiring continued training as policies and NC FAST system enhancements are implemented.

SNAP

Implementation planning also continues for significant changes to the Food and Nutrition Services Program.

Major provisions include:

- Expanded work requirements and revised exemption criteria that will increase eligibility determination complexity and ongoing case management responsibilities.

- State cost-sharing for SNAP benefits beginning in federal fiscal year 2028, creating potential long-term fiscal impacts for North Carolina based on payment accuracy rates.
- A reduction in the federal reimbursement rate for SNAP administrative costs, increasing the financial responsibility of states and counties for program administration.

While many of these provisions have future effective dates, implementation planning, policy development, and staff preparation are already increasing operational demands.

Local Operational Impact

The cumulative effect of these federal changes continues to place additional pressure on Economic Services operations. Staff are experiencing increased administrative responsibilities related to policy implementation, training, verification requirements, and client communication while continuing to maintain federally required timeliness standards for Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services.

Agency leadership continues to work closely with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to monitor implementation guidance, prepare staff for operational changes, evaluate workload impacts, and identify process improvements that support continued delivery of timely and accurate services to Burke County residents. As additional federal and state guidance is released, the department will continue adjusting operations to ensure compliance while maintaining a high level of customer service.

	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
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
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

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	RECERTIFICATION TIMELINESS RATE	Straight Through Processing	Total	
MOU MEASURE												90	90	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		0	17	28,851	698	96%	94%		100%	95%	
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%	waiver
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%	

Social Work Updates

Child Welfare-May

127 active cases in CPS
31 active Family In-Home cases
220 Children experiencing foster care

- 11 entries into foster care during May
- 2 exits

21 young adults in our 18 to 21 program

Child Welfare Update

Child Welfare continues to focus on strengthening its workforce through ongoing recruitment, hiring, and onboarding efforts. The department remains committed to building and retaining a highly qualified workforce to support the increasing needs of children and families in Burke County. Newly hired staff continue to receive structured onboarding, training, and coaching to ensure they are well prepared to assume case responsibilities.

CPS leadership and frontline staff have continued to make significant progress in reducing the number of open Child Protective Services assessments and investigations. Through focused case management, increased supervisory oversight, and the dedication of staff, the division has substantially reduced longstanding caseloads over the past several months while continuing to respond to new reports of abuse, neglect, and dependency in a timely manner.

At the same time, the number of children in foster care has continued to increase, creating additional pressure on placement resources. The limited availability of foster homes and appropriate residential placements remains a significant challenge both locally and across North Carolina. As a result, Burke County DSS has experienced multiple occasions in which children have been required to spend the night in the DSS office while appropriate placements were identified. Although staff continue to work diligently with state partners and placement providers

to minimize these occurrences, placement capacity remains one of the most significant operational challenges facing the Child Welfare system.

The department also continues to prepare for the implementation of PATH NC, the State's new child welfare information system. Burke County was originally scheduled to transition to the system on July 20; however, the statewide rollout has been postponed due to technical issues identified during implementation. At this time, a revised implementation date has not been announced. Agency staff continue to participate in training and implementation activities and remain prepared to transition once the State establishes a new rollout schedule.

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 76 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 May, 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 May, 129 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 May we received 22 new APS reports, of which 12 were screened in for formal investigation. The outcomes of these investigations included:

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

In addition to investigations, APS staff also conducted 4 outreach assessments, made 5 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.