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Monthly Directors Report

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

August 6, 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.

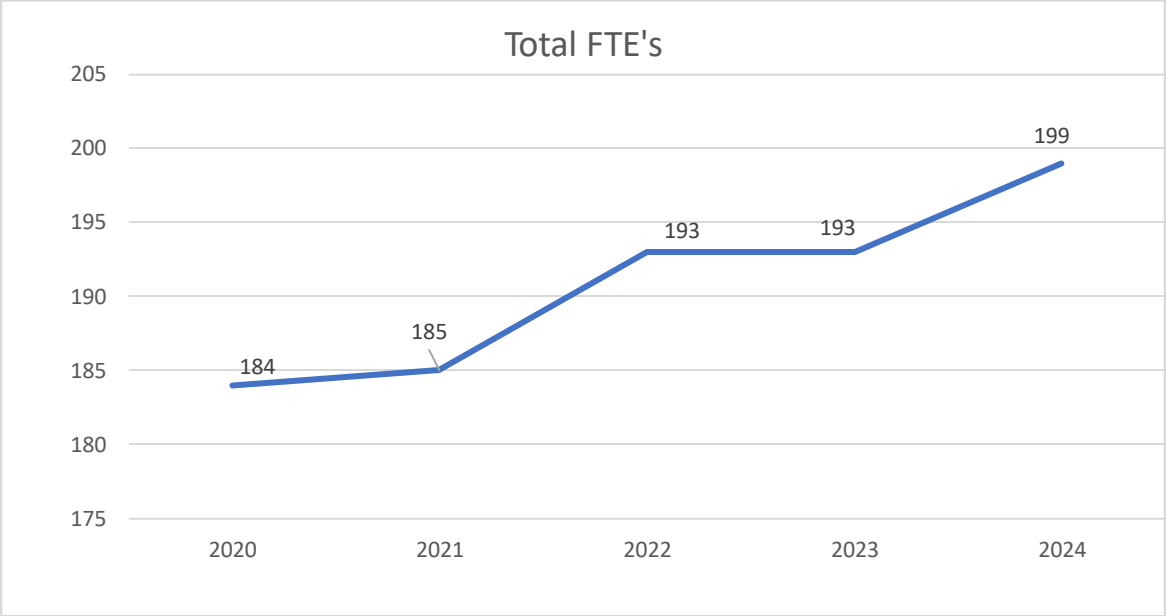
Regards,

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 14 full time vacancies – which represents 7% vacancy rate. Of those 14, 3 have a final offer and 1 has a conditional offer. Once those hirings are completed, that will reduce the vacancy rate to 5%. During the month of June, DSS experienced 7 separations, and had a total of 6 new hires, all of which were for full-time positions.

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 has strengthened the consistency of new employee orientation, enhanced professional development opportunities, and provided supervisors with additional tools to support staff performance and reinforce quality practice standards.

Recruitment efforts within Child Welfare remain a high priority. The department continues to actively recruit qualified professionals while offering sign-on incentives for experienced candidates filling both Child Protective Services (CPS) and Foster Care Social Worker positions. These incentives have strengthened the department's ability to attract experienced practitioners in an increasingly competitive workforce environment and have contributed to improved staffing stability and reduced vacancy rates.

Burke County DSS also remains committed to developing a sustainable workforce pipeline through partnerships with local colleges and universities. The department continues to host student interns, participate in career fairs, provide classroom presentations, and engage in other outreach activities that promote careers in public service and social work while encouraging graduates to pursue employment opportunities with Burke County.

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, increase frontline capacity, and promote timely permanency planning for children and families.

While Child Welfare staffing has remained stable, Economic Services continues to experience significant operational demands 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 complexity of program administration. The department continues to evaluate workflow efficiencies, monitor staffing needs, and identify process improvements to ensure Burke County residents continue to receive timely, accurate, and responsive services.

Open Positions:

Position Title	Position #:	Status
IMC II	51403	
IMC II	51649	Final Offer
IMC II	51395	
IMC III Leadworker	51769	
IMC II	51375	
IMC III Leadworker	51367	
IMC II	51381	
IMC II	51380	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51441	Conditional Offer
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51776	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51778	
SOCIAL WORKER IA&T	51905	
SOCIAL WORKER III	51400	Final Offer
SOCIAL WORKER III	51466	Final Offer

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). Federal agencies and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services continue to release implementation guidance for various provisions, while several operational and policy details remain under development. Although many implementation deadlines extend over the next several years, preparation activities continue to have a significant impact on county operations.

Medicaid

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

Key implementation activities include:

- Continued planning for federal community engagement (work) requirements for certain adults, which will require counties to verify qualifying employment, education, or other approved activities once implemented.
- Preparation for more frequent Medicaid eligibility renewals, increasing the number of eligibility reviews, client contacts, and case actions completed each year.
- Ongoing collaboration with NCDHHS as policy guidance and NC FAST system enhancements are developed to support implementation.
- Continued monitoring of long-term Medicaid financing changes, including the phased reduction of the allowable provider tax cap through 2031.

These changes are expected to significantly increase verification requirements, documentation standards, staff training needs, and administrative workload over the coming years.

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.
- Continued federal guidance related to implementation timelines for work requirement provisions, with several operational details still pending.
- 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 implementation timelines for several SNAP provisions continue to evolve, county agencies must remain prepared to adapt operations as additional federal and state guidance becomes available.

Local Operational Impact

The cumulative effect of these federal changes continues to place additional pressure on Economic Services operations. Staff are balancing ongoing policy implementation activities, training, system updates, increased verification requirements, and client communication while continuing to meet federally mandated 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, the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services, and county partners to monitor implementation guidance, evaluate operational impacts, prepare staff for upcoming changes, and identify process improvements that support the continued delivery of timely, accurate, and customer-focused 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 service.

Economic Services Statistics 2025

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%		
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
JUN	9,735	5,082	572	98.59%	98.98%	98.01%	569	1,635,049.00

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	RECERT COMPLETION TIMELINESS RATE	Straight Through Processing	Total
MOU MEASURE												90	90	95		
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%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%

Social Work Updates

Child Welfare
103 active cases in CPS
31 active Family In-Home cases
216 Children experiencing foster care

- 1 entries into foster care during July
- 8 exits

21 young adults in our 18 to 21 program

Child Welfare Update

Child Welfare continues to strengthen its workforce through focused recruitment, hiring, and employee development initiatives. The department remains committed to building and retaining a highly qualified workforce capable of meeting the growing needs of children and families in Burke County. Recruitment efforts remain active for both Child Protective Services and Foster Care positions, with sign-on incentives continuing to be offered to experienced social workers. These incentives have supported the department's ability to attract qualified professionals in a competitive workforce environment while improving staffing stability and continuity of services.

Newly hired staff continue to receive structured onboarding, comprehensive training, and ongoing coaching to ensure they are well prepared to assume case responsibilities. The continued support provided through the department's Training and Onboarding Supervisor and Quality Assurance Supervisor has strengthened employee readiness, improved practice consistency, and enhanced supervisory support across Child Welfare.

CPS leadership and frontline staff continue to make significant progress in managing Child Protective Services assessments and investigations. Through focused case management, increased supervisory oversight, and the dedication of staff, the division has sustained improvements in workload management while continuing to respond to reports of abuse, neglect, and dependency in a timely manner. These efforts have strengthened service delivery and supported improved outcomes for children and families.

The number of children in foster care continues to place pressure on placement resources. The limited availability of licensed foster homes and appropriate residential treatment placements remains a significant challenge both locally and statewide. Burke County DSS continues to collaborate with state partners, private providers, and community organizations to identify safe and appropriate placements while also working to expand local placement options.

To support these efforts, Burke County DSS is preparing to launch a new partnership with Black Mountain Children's Home and Anuvia Prevention and Recovery through the Every Child Matters initiative. This collaborative effort is designed to strengthen the local continuum of care for children and families by expanding access to prevention services, behavioral health supports, substance use treatment resources, and family-focused interventions. The partnership will

provide additional resources to support families involved with Child Welfare, with the goal of preventing deeper system involvement, supporting reunification efforts, and improving outcomes for children and caregivers in Burke County.

The department is also in the final stages of preparation for the implementation of PATH NC, North Carolina's new statewide child welfare information system. Burke County is currently scheduled to transition to PATH NC on September 8, 2026. Over the past several months, staff have participated in extensive system training, data validation activities, workflow planning, and implementation readiness meetings to prepare for the transition. Agency leadership continues to work closely with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to ensure staff are equipped for a successful implementation while maintaining uninterrupted services to children and families throughout the transition.

While the transition to PATH NC represents a significant operational change, the new system is expected to modernize child welfare practice by improving case management functionality, enhancing data quality, and providing improved tools to support safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families. Burke County DSS remains focused on ensuring a smooth transition while continuing to provide responsive, effective services to the children and families we serve.

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 77 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 June, we received 5 new guardianship referrals, reflecting sustained demand in this area.

Special Assistance In-Home (SAIH)
We are serving 66 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 June, 124 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 June we received 40 new APS reports, of which 21 were screened in for formal investigation. In addition to investigations, APS staff also conducted 14 outreach assessments, made 8 service referrals, and handled 5 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.