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Maureen Schwind
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MINUTES
BURKE COUNTY ADVISOARY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
REGULAR BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, June 2, 2026
10am

Board Present: Nancy Wood
Brian Barrier
Maureen Schwind
Geronimo Blancaflor

Staff Present: Korey Fisher Wellman, County Director
Chazlyn Thomas, Deputy Director
Amanda Grady, Assistant Director
Tammy Wright, Medicaid Program Manager
Amber Conley. CPS Program Manager
Will Winters, FC Program Manager
Kelsey Walker, Administrative Officer
Thadd Hodge, Business Officer

Agenda and minutes:

- Agenda and last meeting minutes were reviewed and unanimously approved.

A. Director's Report & Personnel Update

Vacancy and Staffing Status:

- As of the time of the report:
  - 11 open full-time positions (5.5% vacancy rate), a stable and improved number for recent months.
  - In April: 6 separations, 6 full-time hires, 1 part-time hire (overall staffing level stable).
  - Most openings remain in CPS and social worker roles, noted as the hardest positions to recruit and retain.

MOU Outcomes:

- Economic services staff consistently meet their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outcomes monthly despite ongoing changes in rules and policies.

- Emphasis on the importance of staff stability and outcomes, especially relative to other counties.

B. Adult Services & Guardianship

Ward Numbers:

- Notable increase in total number of wards under county guardianship, approaching 100, which is significant for a county of this size.
- The trend is toward younger wards, particularly those aging out of foster care or presenting with acute mental health/substance abuse needs.
- Finding placements for younger adults (30s-40s, mental health/substance use issues) is more challenging than for elderly.
- Currently contract out 17 slots for wards. These are not part of the main 75 count; expansion of contracted care may be necessary due to workforce limitations.

Referrals and Trends:

- Many younger adult wards are transient/homeless or lack family support due to family fatigue and burnout with complex needs.
- Restoration of rights for these individuals is rare; clients sometimes initiate such petitions independently if they feel stable.

Placement and Supervision:

- Guardianship clients typically reside in facilities, group homes, or Adult Family Living settings, but some may cycle through homelessness.
- Staff challenges include tracking and supporting transient clients and managing complex, often long-term, caseloads.

C. Child Protective Services (CPS) & Foster Care

CPS Caseload Reduction:

- Significant reduction in open CPS cases from nearly 300 to 132 (as of June 2), a 48% decrease in 2026, credited to focused team efforts under Amber Conley.
- CPS staffing has improved—now only two vacancies.
- Average caseload approaching state norms (current: <15, target: 10–12).

Foster Care Challenges:

- Increase in foster care numbers; April saw 14 children enter care, 3 exits.
- Higher number of older youths (primarily 17-year-olds) who are difficult to place, sometimes leading to extended (30+ days) stays in the office.
- Noted example: one youth placed in the office for 32 consecutive days, being sent to a short-term assessment center in Utah. Reluctance from facilities to accept older teens, especially with extensive care histories.
- Over 200 placement referrals recently yielded only denials for high-needs youth.

Staff Impact & Systemic Issues:

- Office stays create operational strains: staff required around the clock (4-hour shifts, 2–3 staff at a time, including PRN/after-hours support), emotional toll on both staff and youths.
- Youths sometimes form attachments to office settings due to instability elsewhere, making discharge challenging.

D. MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) Updates

- MOU mandates were reinstated in 2024 after exclusions during COVID and Hurricane Helene.
- Counties now held accountable; for Burke County, primary MOU metric for child welfare is face-to-face foster care visits (must be conducted by DSS staff, not Guardian ad litem).
- MOU covers most DSS areas except Medicaid, with statewide dashboards for tracking compliance.
- Emphasis on need for sufficient workforce/funding to meet standards; performance metrics impact county accountability.

E. Budget Update

Financial Status:

- Department is at 85% spent; target for this point would be about 91%. On track to be under budget this year.
- Budget variances by section, with amendments planned to correct any negatives.
- County funds unused by DSS return to the county's general fund; other funds (e.g., special adoption funds) are reserved for future DSS use.

F. Medicaid and Economic Services

Staffing and Pay Issues:

- Noted recent vacancies in Medicaid, particularly among lead workers, with recruitment impaired by limited pay differential ($1.50/hour above line staff).
- In-house and external applicants are scarce, prompting consideration of reclassification to create a dedicated "training team."
- Work with HR underway; possible upgrades to these roles.

Audits and Process Issues:

- Just completed a single county audit, about to begin a significant REBA audit (10 months long, occurs every three years).
- Policy for HR1 changes has been communicated, but operational process information is lacking, causing planning difficulties for staff assignments.

Service Metrics:

- Ongoing effort to maintain high performance in Medicaid reviews (above 90%), FNS (Food and
- Nutrition Services), and other benefits.

Prolonged Stays for Foster Youths in Office

Key Issues:

- Increasing trend of extended stays (days to weeks) for teens due to placement shortages—primarily behavioral health-driven, not simple foster home care.
- Staff are burdened with 24/7 supervision, rotating 4-hour shifts, affecting their primary duties and wellbeing.
- System only designed to sustain such situations for ~10 days; longer periods create cumulative stress and operational bottlenecks.
- Exploration of community volunteers discussed—stymied by regulatory, liability, and training requirements (including background checks, child welfare training, and state mandates for certified social worker presence).
- Use of PRN (Per Required Need) after-hours staff helps but does not eliminate the persistent staff impact.
- Youths' attachment to staff/office (a place where they're cared for) complicates placement when alternatives become available.

Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining Staff

- Medicaid and economic services positions, notably lead workers, are unattractive due to minimal pay increase and high responsibility.
- Suggestions to restructure roles (e.g., create trainers vs. leads) and continue engaging HR for solutions.
- Pay disparities and workload balance remain ongoing concerns.

Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned following final remarks and approval motions.