Monthly Directors Report

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

February 2, 2026
Board of Commissioners
200 Avery Avenue
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.

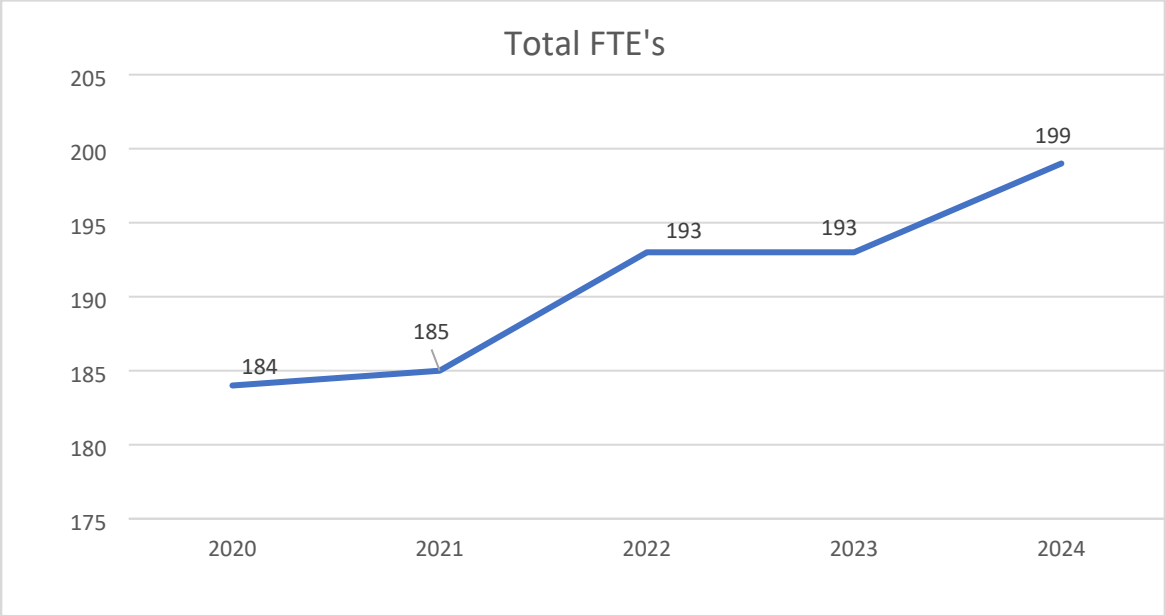
Regards,

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 2023 following the passing of Medicaid Expansion in December 2023. 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 15 full time vacancies – which represents 7.5% vacancy rate. During the month of December, DSS experienced 5 separations, and had a total of 3 new hires, all of which were for full-time positions.

Over the past several months, the agency has made measurable progress in stabilizing the Child Welfare workforce and strengthening staff retention. In close partnership with Human Resources, agency leadership has implemented a series of targeted initiatives focused on reducing turnover, improving onboarding, and enhancing overall employee support.

As part of this work, the agency successfully filled two critical Child Welfare leadership positions: a Training and Onboarding Supervisor and a Quality Assurance Supervisor. These roles were intentionally established to strengthen the onboarding experience for new employees, provide consistent and ongoing training, and support continuous quality improvement across the division. Together, they help ensure staff are better prepared, supported, and aligned with best practice standards.

In addition, the agency implemented an enhanced recruitment strategy aimed at attracting experienced Child Protective Services (CPS) professionals. This strategy includes a sign-on bonus

for applicants with at least one year of directly related DSS experience who do not require pre-service training. This targeted approach allows the agency to bring skilled professionals into frontline roles more efficiently while reducing training timelines and associated costs.

To further address service demands and staffing pressures, the agency has taken strategic steps to maximize and realign existing resources. Over the past several months, three positions were reclassified to better align with current workload and operational needs. These reclassifications resulted in the creation of an additional CPS Social Worker position, a CPS Supervisor position to enhance supervisory coverage and staff support, and a Visitation Coach role within Foster Care to improve visitation quality and support permanency efforts.

While progress has been made in Child Welfare, the agency has experienced a recent uptick in turnover within Economic Services. Several factors are contributing to this trend, including increased workload demands and heightened administrative scrutiny following the passage of HR 1, which significantly expanded documentation, verification, and compliance requirements in both Medicaid and Food and Nutrition programs. Agency leadership is closely monitoring staffing levels and workload data in Economic Services and is working with Human Resources to identify strategies to support staff, mitigate further turnover, and maintain service continuity.

Collectively, these actions reflect a comprehensive and data-informed approach to workforce stabilization that emphasizes targeted recruitment, strengthened training and onboarding, strategic restructuring, and enhanced supervisory support. Agency leadership remains committed to monitoring staffing trends, workload pressures, and service demands across all divisions to ensure continued progress in performance, practice quality, employee satisfaction, and retention.

Open Positions:

Position Title	Position #:	Status
IMC III Lead worker	51901	
IMC III Lead worker	51769	
IMC III	51385	
IMC II	51382	
IMC II	51823	
IMC II	51898	
IMC II	51785	
IMC II	51783	
PA IV	52047	
Social Worker IAT	51775	

Social Worker IAT	51907	
Social Worker III	51466	Interviews
Social Worker III	51467	
Social Work Supervisor III	51788	Interviews
Administrative Officer II	51667	

Economic Services Updates:

Update on Federal Medicaid and SNAP Policy Changes

Over the past several months, significant federal policy changes have occurred that directly affect the administration of Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These changes stem from major federal legislation and introduce new administrative requirements, increased workload complexity, and potential long-term fiscal impacts for both state and county operations. These developments are unfolding as local departments of social services continue to manage high caseloads and workforce stabilization efforts, underscoring the importance of flexibility, careful monitoring, and advance planning at the county level.

Federal Legislative Update: One Big Beautiful Bill Act (HR1)

In July 2025, Congress enacted the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (HR1), a comprehensive reform package that significantly restructures key elements of both Medicaid and SNAP. Several provisions became effective on October 1, 2025, with additional changes scheduled to phase in over the coming years. Collectively, these reforms carry direct operational and fiscal implications for county DSS agencies.

Medicaid Changes

Key Medicaid provisions now in effect include a reduction in the allowable provider tax cap, which is scheduled to decrease from 6% to 3.5% by 2031. This change impacts Medicaid financing statewide and may affect long-term program sustainability. HR1 also implemented new federal work requirements for adults ages 19–64, requiring verification of at least 80 hours per month of qualifying employment, education, or volunteer activity. In addition, Medicaid eligibility redeterminations must now occur every six months rather than annually, effectively doubling the review cycle for counties. Other changes, including modifications to certain optional benefits and provider reimbursement structures, will continue to be phased in over time. Taken together, these provisions substantially increase eligibility verification, documentation, compliance monitoring, and administrative workload for county DSS staff.

SNAP Policy Changes Under HR1

HR1 also introduces significant structural and funding changes to SNAP. Beginning in 2027, states with higher payment error rates will be required to share in the cost of benefits. Based on North Carolina's current error rate, the state would fall into the 15 percent cost-sharing tier, with an estimated annual impact of approximately $420 million. Additionally, the federal share of SNAP administrative funding has been reduced from 50 percent to 25 percent, shifting a greater share of administrative costs to states and counties. The legislation also expands work requirements to additional populations while narrowing or eliminating certain exemptions. These changes are expected to increase case complexity, verification demands, and long-term administrative responsibilities at the county level.

Local and County-Level Implications

The implementation of HR1 presents both immediate and long-term challenges for county departments of social services. In the short term, staff are experiencing increased time demands related to eligibility verification, documentation, and client education as new requirements are implemented. Administratively, counties must adapt quickly to revised policies while maintaining timely and accurate service delivery.

Over the longer term, the shift to six-month Medicaid redeterminations and ongoing monitoring of work requirements is expected to sustain higher eligibility workloads. Reduced federal funding for SNAP administration may also shift additional financial responsibility to counties, while expanded oversight and quality-control expectations will continue to increase administrative demands across both programs.

Agency leadership will continue to closely monitor federal guidance, state implementation plans, workload data, and potential fiscal impacts. Ongoing assessment will be critical to ensuring compliance with new requirements while maintaining service continuity for Burke County's most vulnerable residents.

MEDICAID

											MOU MEASURE	90	90	95			
	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 * includes MXP or FP	FAMILY AND CHILDREN ACTIVE CASES * includes MXP or FP	TOTAL MEDICAID APPLICATIONS TAKEN	TOTAL MEDICAID REVIEWS		CAP REFERRALS	LTC REFERRALS	TOTAL MEDICAID RECIPIENTS	TOTAL NEMT TRIPS	REPORT CARD MAD	REPORT CARD OTHER	RECERT COMPLETION TIMELINESS RATE	Straight Through Processing	Total
JAN	5412	7,612	23126	14,845	565	2090		5	9	28,538	651	96%	96%	[redacted]	100%	96%
FEB	5391	7,608	23436	14,952	352	*		1	7	28,561	683	93%	95%	[redacted]	100%	95%
MAR	5356	7,618	23247	15,012	411	*		11	13	28603	735	100%	95%	[redacted]	100%	95%
APR	5389	7,752	23481	15,037	380	1571		4	12	28,870	683	96%	95%	[redacted]	100%	95%
MAY	5351	7,658	23365	15,147	382	*		3	9	28,716	713	93%	97%	[redacted]	100%	97%
JUN	5338	7,683	23515	15,235	346	1540		0	17	28,851	698	96%	94%	[redacted]	100%	95%
JUL	5327	7,734	23,544	15,333	382	1435		2	18	28,873	731	93%	95%	[redacted]	100%	95%
AUG	5283	7,753	23448	15,418	325	1386		1	12	28,731	823	100%	96%	[redacted]	100%	96%
SEP	5289	7,744	23471	15,459	378	1586		2	16	28,740	756	100%	94%	[redacted]	100%	94%
OCT	5311	7,747	23422	16,290	398	1606		1	16	28,733	638	100%	98%	[redacted]	100%	98%
NOV	5342	7,755	23,381	15,465	472	1825		2	12	28,723	624	100%	96%	[redacted]	100%	97%
DEC	5313	7,761	23,324	15,542	560	1890		3	15	28,637	832	100%	95%	[redacted]	100%	96%

	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
JAN	12,108	6275	585	100%	99.31%	97.77%	525	1,973,378.00
FEB	11,951	6236	449	97.18%	100%	98.75%	561	1,963,605.00
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

Social Work Updates

Child Welfare

253 active cases in CPS
33 active Family In-Home cases
192 Children experiencing foster care

- 6 entries into foster care during October
- 4 exits

18 young adults in our 18 to 21 program

PATH NC Transition Update

The Department of Social Services continues to actively prepare for the agency's transition later this year to PATH NC for Child Welfare In-Home Services, Permanency Planning, and Financials. This transition represents a significant statewide modernization effort designed to replace legacy systems with a more integrated, consistent, and data-driven platform for child welfare practice.

PATH NC is intended to improve the way child welfare work is documented, tracked, and managed across North Carolina. The system is designed to support more standardized practice, strengthen data accuracy, enhance reporting capabilities, and improve continuity as cases move between program areas. Ultimately, PATH NC is expected to support better decision-making, stronger accountability, and improved outcomes for children and families by aligning technology more closely with practice.

In preparation for this transition, DSS leadership and staff have been engaged in ongoing planning and readiness activities. These efforts include reviewing current workflows, identifying process changes required under PATH NC, and working with state partners to understand system functionality and implementation expectations. Particular attention is being given to how the

transition will impact frontline staff in In-Home Services and Permanency Planning, as well as fiscal staff responsible for child welfare financials.

The agency is also coordinating closely with Training and Quality Assurance to ensure staff are supported before, during, and after implementation. Preparatory work includes developing training plans, identifying staff who will require additional support during the transition, and reviewing data integrity to ensure information is accurately migrated into the new system. Leadership is focused on minimizing disruption to service delivery while maintaining compliance and continuity throughout the transition period.

While the transition to PATH NC will require a significant investment of time and effort, it is an important step toward modernizing child welfare operations and strengthening statewide consistency. DSS leadership will continue to monitor readiness, adjust timelines as needed, and keep the Board informed as implementation approaches.

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 71 adult wards through public guardianship services. An additional 16 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 December, we received seven new guardianship referrals, reflecting sustained demand in this area.

Special Assistance In-Home (SAIH)
We are serving 54 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 December, 133 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 December we received 24 new APS reports, of which 11 were screened in for formal investigation. The outcomes of these investigations included:

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

In addition to investigations, APS staff also conducted 8 outreach assessments, made 9 service referrals, and handled 7 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.