Monthly Directors Report

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

November 3, 2025

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.

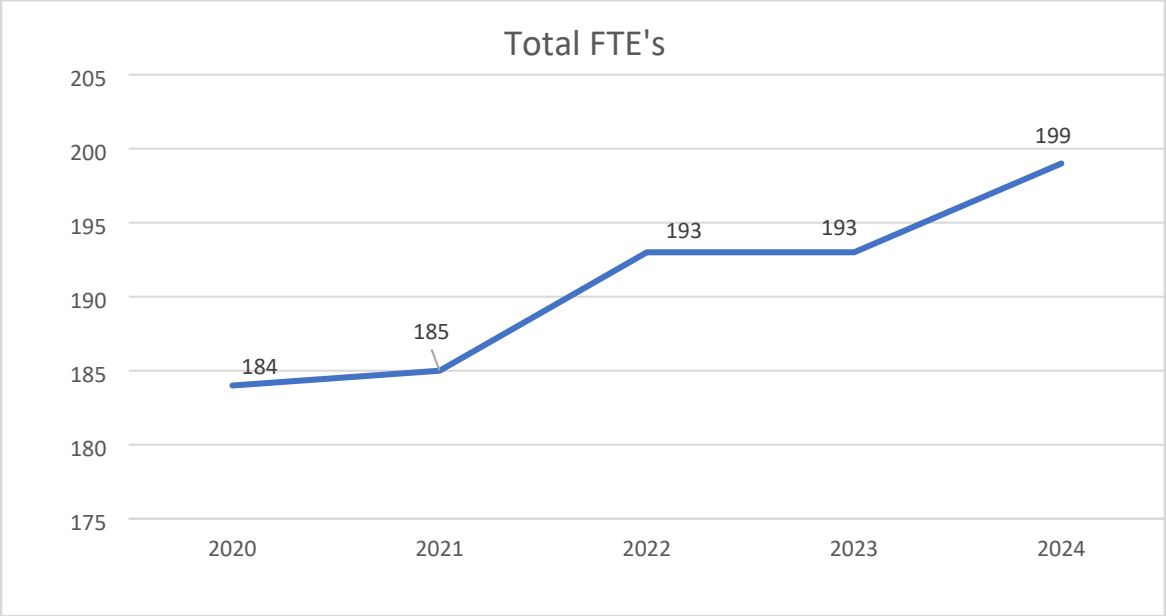
Thank you for your leadership and support. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

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 in 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. Recently, DSS have also added 10 additional contract social workers and 2 contracted social work supervisors to help complete a time-limited cps project. Due to the progress of the team, that has been reduced to 5 contract social workers and supervisor.



Of the 199 active FTEs in the department, currently, we have 18 full time vacancies – which represents 9% vacancy rate. Of those positions, 6 have a conditional or final offer. The completion of those hires will reduce our vacancy rate to 6%. During the month of September, DSS experienced 10 separations, and had a total of 4 new hires, all of which were for full-time positions.

Over the past several months, the agency has made meaningful progress in stabilizing the workforce and strengthening staff retention. In collaboration with Human Resources, agency leadership launched a series of initiatives aimed at addressing turnover and enhancing employee support. These efforts began with comprehensive listening sessions led by HR to gather input from staff across all levels. The findings were reviewed by the executive leadership team, HR, and the county manager, resulting in the development of clear leadership expectations in partnership with supervisors. The county manager also engaged directly with staff to reaffirm the county's commitment to a supportive and responsive work environment. To ensure continued responsiveness, the agency has implemented ongoing internal feedback loops and administers regular surveys to gauge employee satisfaction, identify emerging concerns, and inform future initiatives.

Building on this momentum, we have hired both a Training and Onboarding Supervisor and a Quality Assurance Supervisor in Child Welfare. These new roles are designed to strengthen onboarding, provide ongoing training, and lead quality improvement efforts across the division. Additionally, the agency has launched an aggressive recruitment campaign to attract experienced Child Protective Services (CPS) professionals. As part of this initiative, we are offering a sign-on bonus for any new staff who bring at least one year of directly related DSS experience and do not require pre-service training. We believe these investments in workforce development, training, and targeted recruitment will have a significant impact not only on performance and practice but also on overall job satisfaction and staff retention.

Open Positions:

Position Title	Position #:	Status
IMC III Leadworker	52045	
IMC III Leadworker	51901	
IMC III	52002	
IMC II	51382	
PA IV	52047	
IMC II	51820	
IMC II	51898	
PA IV	51418	
After Hours Support Specialist	52062	Conditional Offer
Part Time PA IV	52081	Conditional Offer
Social Worker IAT	51866	Conditional Offer
Social Worker IAT	51437	Final Offer
Social Worker IAT	51438	
Social Worker III	51468	Final Offer
Social Worker IAT	51776	
Social Worker III	51829	
Social Worker IAT	51441	

Social Worker Supervisor III	51424	Conditional Offer
Staff Development Specialist	51667	

Economic Services Updates:

Update on Federal Medicaid and SNAP Policy Changes — October 2025

As part of our ongoing efforts to keep the Board informed of policy changes that may affect county operations, this update provides an overview of recent federal actions impacting Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These developments come at a time when our agency continues to focus on stabilizing our workforce, managing high caseloads, and ensuring continuity of services for Burke County residents. The combined effect of new federal mandates and the current government shutdown underscores the importance of maintaining flexibility and preparedness at the local level.

Federal Legislative Update: One Big Beautiful Bill Act

In July 2025, Congress enacted the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, a sweeping reform package that introduces significant changes to both Medicaid and SNAP. These changes will alter funding structures, eligibility rules, and administrative responsibilities across North Carolina, with county-level implications beginning this fall.

Medicaid Updates

Implementation of several key provisions began October 1, 2025:

- **Provider tax reduction:** The federal provider tax cap will gradually decrease from 6% to 3.5% by 2031, changing how North Carolina finances Medicaid services, particularly those supported through state-directed payments.
- **Work requirements:** Adults ages 19–64 must now document at least 80 hours per mont**h** of employment, education, or volunteer activity, with limited exemptions.
- **Increased eligibility reviews:** Redeterminations will occur every six months instead of annually, substantially increasing county DSS workloads.
- **Additional changes:** Adjustments to provider reimbursement rates and limits on optional benefits are being phased in under the new law.

These policy shifts will result in greater administrative demands for county DSS agencies, particularly in case management, eligibility verification, and compliance monitoring.

SNAP Updates

The Act also brings major changes to the SNAP program’s funding and oversight:

- **State cost-sharing for benefit errors:** Beginning in October 2027, states with higher payment error rates must share in benefit costs. North Carolina's 2024 rate of 10.2% places it in the 15% cost-sharing tier, translating to roughly $420 million annually at current enrollment levels.
- **Reduced federal support:** The federal share of SNAP administrative costs will decline from 50% to 25%, shifting additional expenses to states and counties.
- **Expanded work requirements:** Participation rules will broaden, while several exemptions will be narrowed or eliminated.

The North Carolina General Assembly and NC DHHS will determine how these requirements are implemented, but counties should expect heavier administrative workloads and potential budget pressures.

USDA Directive and Federal Shutdown Impact

The ongoing federal government shutdown, which began October 1, 2025, has introduced additional uncertainty.

- On October 10, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that due to insufficient federal funds, November SNAP benefits will not be issued unless appropriations are restored.
- The USDA confirmed it will not use contingency funds to cover November benefits and directed states to withhold SNAP allotments until further notice.
- States have been warned that if they choose to issue benefits using state funds**, federal reimbursement is not guaranteed.**

While October benefits were already funded and distributed, this directive means that millions of households, including those in our county, may experience a disruption in SNAP assistance beginning November 1 if the shutdown continues.

Local and County Implications

For Burke County DSS, these developments present both immediate and long-term challenges:

- **Short-term:** The potential suspension of November SNAP benefits may drive increased demand for emergency food resources and community assistance.
- **Long-term:** Medicaid and SNAP reforms will require more frequent eligibility reviews, added documentation, and expanded oversight, all of which will impact staffing capacity and workload management.
- **Operational readiness:** DSS leadership is monitoring state guidance daily and coordinating with local partners to ensure residents are supported if SNAP benefits are delayed or reduced.

Next Steps

- Continue to monitor updates from NC DHHS and USDA regarding SNAP issuance and Medicaid implementation timelines.

- Prepare a **communication plan** for clients outlining potential benefit impacts and available local resources.
- Coordinate with food banks and community organizations to strengthen emergency food distribution networks.

											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	
5384	7609	21,937	13958	382	412	1890	3	17	27,323	626	96%	92%		100%	93%	
5387	7563	22,277	14091	446	90	1128	4	14	27,666	642	96%	92%		100%	93%	
5405	7584	22,655	14304	688	363	1746	9	10	28,062	573	97%	97%		100%	97%	
5415	7567	22936	14554	582	1485	2246	10	11	28,351	582	100%	97%		100%	96%	
5412	7612	23126	14845	565	2090	2900	5	9	28,538	651	96%	96%		100%	96%	
5391	7,608	23436	14,952	352	2223	2580	1	7	28,561	683	93%	95%		100%	95%	
5356	7,618	23247	15,012	411	855	2969	11	13	28603	735	100%	95%		100%	95%	
5389	7,752	23481	15,037	380	1571	*	4	12	28,870	683	96%	95%		100%	95%	
5351	7,658	23365	15,147	382	*	*	3	9	28,716	713	93%	97%		100%	97%	
5338	7,683	23515	15,235	346	1540	n/a	0	17	28,851	698	96%	94%		100%	95%	
5327	7,734	23,544	15,333	382	1435	n/a	2	18	28,873	*	93%	95%		100%	95%	
5283	7,753	23448	15,418	325	1386	n/a	1	12	28,731	823	100%	96%		100%	96%	
5289	7,744	23471	15,459	378	1586	n/a	2	16	28,740	756	100%	94%		100%	94%	

	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
SEP	11,199	5814	525	99.51%	98.26%	98.28%	406	*
OCT	11,503	5975	731/6302	98.54%	94.23%	72.63%	285	3230130
NOV	11,981	6206	394	100.00%	97.81	67%	739	2962954
DEC	12,193	6312	346	97.62%	98.15%	100%	356	2016823
JAN	12,108	6275	585	99.31%	99.77%	100%	525	1,973,378
FEB	11,951	6236	449	97.18%	100%	98.75%	561	1,963,605
MAR	11,907	6183	499	97.21%	100%	98.48%	526	1,965,566
APR	11,396	5959	591	97.24%	100.00%	97.77%	720	1,871,687
MAY	11,002	5732	576	98.11%	99.15%	99.13%	692	1,808,941
JUN	10,804	5,597	598	97.69%	92.73%	98.19%	553	1783246
JUL	10,715	5,556	594	96.83%	96.84%	98.74%	548	1760696
AUG	10,783	5602	558	99.52%	99.31%	98.86%	528	1778789
SEP	10,794	5605	580	99.13%	97.98%	99.41%	509	1752253

Social Work Updates

Child Welfare

255 active cases in CPS

194 Children experiencing foster care

- 17 entries into foster care during September
- 6 exits

18 young adults in our 18 to 21 program

Training and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Update — September 2025

Our Training and CQI teams continue to make steady progress in strengthening workforce development, improving practice consistency, and supporting long-term staff retention. Throughout September, both teams have focused on enhancing collaboration between training, supervision, and quality assurance to ensure staff are fully equipped to deliver high-quality, consistent services to the families and individuals we serve.

Onboarding & Supervisor Partnership
During September, the structured 30-, 60-, and 90-day onboarding plan continued to guide the development of new staff across all program areas. The plan ensures that training remains intentional, progressive, and tied directly to job responsibilities. Supervisors and training staff have maintained close communication to track progress, reinforce learning, and address challenges early. This partnership between training and supervision continues to strengthen consistency in practice and promote accountability.

Training & Retention
A continued focus this month has been on building staff confidence and competency in using the PATHNC system. Ongoing training and one-on-one support have helped new employees transition more smoothly to a full workload. In addition, the training team continues to assess staff strengths and needs across supervisory teams to identify targeted professional development opportunities. September also featured cross-program collaboration sessions designed to foster peer support and shared learning among staff. These initiatives not only build skill but also reinforce retention by investing in employee growth and engagement.

Policy & Procedure
The QA team has continued to refine internal policy tools and step-by-step practice guides to ensure clarity and consistency across divisions. Regular reviews are being conducted to align internal procedures with updated state and federal guidance, and the team remains focused on connecting policy to everyday casework. This month, QA staff worked closely with supervisors to identify areas where additional guidance or clarification is needed, helping to reduce errors and strengthen the quality of documentation and decision-making.

Data Utilization
The CQI team continues to expand the agency's use of data to inform decisions and drive continuous improvement. Emphasis remains on maintaining clean, timely data entry to support accurate reporting and analysis. In September, the team reviewed service and performance trends to identify areas for improvement and ensure compliance with program standards. Work also continues on developing user-friendly reporting tools for supervisors and leadership to support data-driven decision-making and transparency in operations.

Summary

Our Training and CQI teams are working in tandem to create a culture of continuous learning, accountability, and improvement. From the first days of onboarding to advanced professional development and data-driven analysis, these efforts ensure that staff are supported, expectations are clear, and practices remain consistent across all areas of service. Together, these initiatives strengthen our workforce, enhance retention, and ultimately improve outcomes for the residents of Burke County.

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. Below is a summary of key program activity for the month of September:

Guardianship
We are currently serving 66 adult wards through public guardianship services. Of these, 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 September, we received two new guardianship referrals, reflecting sustained demand in this area.

Special Assistance In-Home (SAIH)
We are serving 51 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 September, 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 September, we received 35 new APS reports, of which 16 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 10 outreach assessments, made 12 service referrals, and handled 2 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.