Monthly Directors Report

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

December, 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.

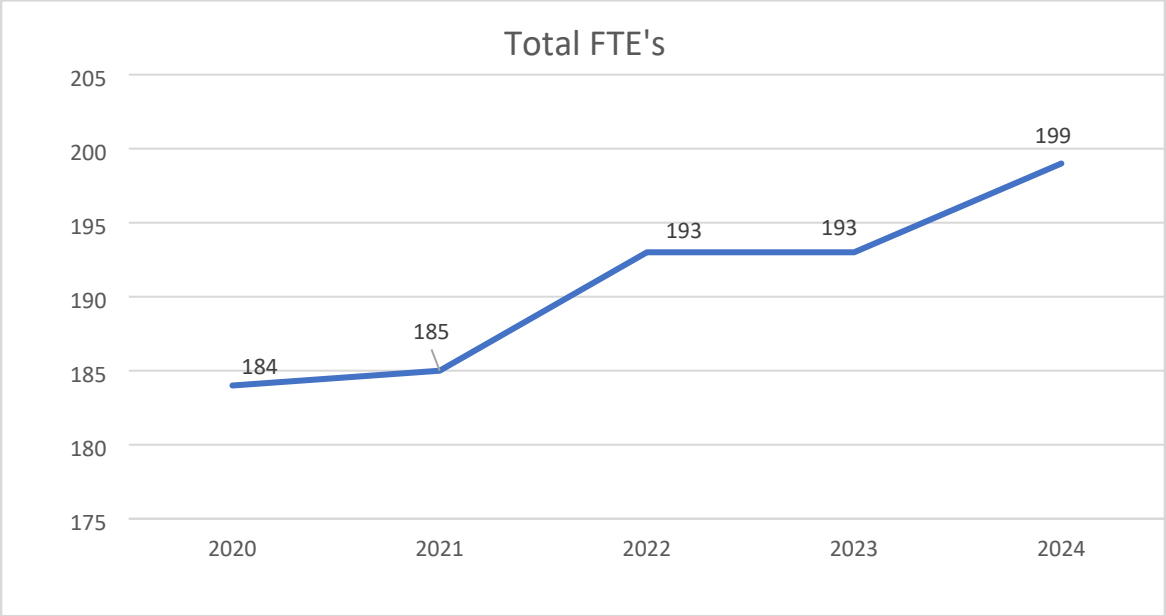
Thank you for your leadership and support. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

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 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 specialists 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 3 contract social workers



Of the 199 active FTEs in the department, currently, we have 14 full time vacancies – which represents 7% vacancy rate. Of those positions, 2 have a conditional or final offer. The completion of those hires will reduce our vacancy rate to 6%. During the month of October, DSS experienced 2 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. Building on this momentum, we have filled two key positions in Child Welfare, a Training and Onboarding Supervisor and a Quality Assurance Supervisor, both of which are designed to strengthen onboarding, provide ongoing training, and support quality improvement efforts across the division. Additionally, the agency has launched an aggressive recruitment campaign to attract experienced Child Protective Services (CPS) professionals, including the implementation of a sign-on bonus for applicants with at least one year of directly related DSS experience who do not require pre-service training.

As we continue to monitor service demands, staffing data, and operational needs, the agency has also taken strategic steps to maximize existing resources. Over the past few months, we have reclassified three positions to better align with current workload pressures and enhance support to staff. These reclassifications resulted in the creation of an additional CPS Social Worker position, a CPS supervisor position, and a visitation coach role within foster care. Each of these adjustments was made to strengthen frontline capacity, improve supervisory support, and enhance services to children and families.

We believe these combined investments, focused on workforce stabilization, targeted recruitment, training, and strategic restructuring, will continue to improve performance, strengthen practice, and enhance job satisfaction and retention across the agency.

Open Positions:

Position Title	Position #:	Status
IMC III Lead worker	51901	
IMC II	51382	
IMC II	51820	
IMC II	51898	
Social Worker IAT	51866	Conditional Offer
Social Worker IAT	51438	Conditional Offer
Social Worker IAT	51776	
Social Worker IAT	51441	
Social Worker IAT	51905	
Social Worker IAT	51341	
Social Worker III	51829	
Social Worker II	51682	
Social Worker Supervisor III	52045	
Administrative Officer II	51667	

Economic Services Updates:

Update on Federal Medicaid and SNAP Policy Changes — October 2025

This month brought several significant developments affecting the administration of Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), driven both by large federal policy changes and the recent federal government shutdown. These developments come at a time when our agency continues to manage high caseloads and stabilize our workforce, making it critical that we remain adaptable and prepared.

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

In July 2025, Congress passed the **One Big Beautiful Bill Act (HR1)**, a sweeping reform package that enacts major changes to Medicaid and SNAP. Some of these provisions took effect on October 1 and carry direct implications for county DSS operations.

Key Medicaid Changes (Effective October 1, 2025)
The following provisions are already impacting eligibility and administrative workloads:

- **Provider tax reduction:** The cap is being reduced from 6% to 3.5% by 2031, affecting Medicaid financing statewide.
- **New federal work requirements:** Adults ages 19–64 must verify **80 hours per month** of work, education, or volunteer activity.
- **More frequent eligibility reviews:** Redeterminations now occur **every six months**, doubling the required review cycle.
- **Additional phased-in changes:** Adjustments to certain optional benefits and provider reimbursement structures.

Together, these changes significantly increase documentation, verification, and compliance requirements for county DSS staff.

SNAP Policy Changes Under HR1

HR1 also introduces major structural and financial changes to SNAP:

- **State cost-sharing for benefit errors (beginning 2027):**
  NC's payment error rate would place it in the **15% cost-sharing tier**, an estimated **$420 million annually**.
- **Reduction in federal administrative funding:**
  The federal share of SNAP administrative costs is being cut **from 50% to 25%**.
- **Expanded work requirements:**
  More groups will be required to meet participation rules, and several exemptions will be narrowed.

These changes will likely increase long-term caseload complexity and administrative workloads at the county level.

Impact of the Federal Government Shutdown on SNAP

The shutdown that began on **October 1, 2025,** caused major uncertainty around SNAP benefit issuance.

How SNAP Was Affected and Ultimately Processed

- On **October 10**, USDA directed states **not to issue November SNAP benefits** due to lack of federal funding.
- USDA confirmed it would **not use contingency funds** and warned that benefits issued using state dollars **may not be reimbursed**.
- This created a temporary halt in November SNAP processing statewide.
- On **October 24**, after a partial appropriations agreement, USDA authorized states to release **70% of November benefits**.

Local Response

- Burke County DSS processed all approved SNAP benefits as soon as funds were released.
- Staff responded to elevated call volumes and client concerns related to delayed benefits.
- Demand for emergency food support increased as households experienced uncertainty about November assistance.

Local and County-Level Implications

The combined impact of HR1 and the shutdown has created both immediate and long-term challenges:

Short-Term Effects

- Increased community need for food assistance due to delayed SNAP benefits.
- Higher call volumes and client support needs as households navigated uncertainty.

Long-Term Implications

- Significant increases in Medicaid eligibility workload due to six-month redeterminations and new work requirements.
- Reduced federal funding for SNAP administration may shift future costs to counties.
- Additional oversight, documentation, and quality-control responsibilities across both programs.

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		
SEP	5384	7609	21,937	13958	382	412	1890	3	17	27,323	626	96%	92%		100%	93%
OCT	5387	7563	22,277	14091	446	90	1128	4	14	27,666	642	96%	92%		100%	93%
NOV	5405	7584	22,655	14304	688	363	1746	9	10	28,062	573	97%	97%		100%	97%
DEC	5415	7567	22936	14554	582	1485	2246	10	11	28,351	582	100%	97%		100%	96%
JAN	5412	7612	23126	14845	565	2090	2900	5	9	28,538	651	96%	96%		100%	96%
FEB	5391	7,608	23436	14,952	352	2223	2580	1	7	28,561	683	93%	95%		100%	95%
MAR	5356	7,618	23247	15,012	411	855	2969	11	13	28603	735	100%	95%		100%	95%
APR	5389	7,752	23481	15,037	380	1571	*	4	12	28,870	683	96%	95%		100%	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	n/a	0	17	28,851	698	96%	94%		100%	95%
JUL	5327	7,734	23,544	15,333	382	1435	n/a	2	18	28,873	*	93%	95%		100%	95%
AUG	5283	7,753	23448	15,418	325	1386	n/a	1	12	28,731	823	100%	96%		100%	96%
SEP	5289	7,744	23471	15,459	378	1586	n/a	2	16	28,740	756	100%	94%		100%	94%
OCT	5311	7,747	23422	16,290	398	1606	n/a	1	16	28,733	638	100%	98%		100%	98%

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%		
OCT	11,503	5975	731/6302	98.54%	94.23%	72.63%	285	3,230,130.00
NOV	11,981	6206	394	100.00%	97.81	67%	739	2,962,954.00
DEC	12,193	6312	346	97.62%	98.15%	100%	356	2,016,823.00
JAN	12,108	6275	585	99.31%	99.77%	100%	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

Social Work Updates

Child Welfare

288 active cases in CPS

187 Children experiencing foster care

- 6 entries into foster care during October
- 4 exits

18 young adults in our 18 to 21 program

Training and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Update — November 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 November, both teams have focused on reinforcing connections between training, supervision, and quality assurance to ensure staff remain fully supported and equipped to provide high-quality services to the children, families, and individuals we serve.

Onboarding & Supervisor Partnership

The structured 30-, 60-, and 90-day onboarding plan continues to guide the development of new staff across all program areas. This framework ensures intentional, progressive skill-building that aligns directly with job responsibilities. Training staff and supervisors remain in close communication to track learning milestones, reinforce expectations, and offer timely support when challenges arise. This ongoing partnership continues to strengthen consistency in practice and ensures new employees feel supported from their first day through their transition to full caseloads.

Training, Retention & Direct Support to Staff

A continued focus this month has been supporting staff in strengthening their use of the PATHNC system. Hands-on training, targeted refreshers, and individualized coaching have helped employees build confidence and efficiency in daily practice.

To further reinforce staff support and retention, the agency added an additional CPS Supervisor position this month. This role was created specifically to provide more direct support to CPS workers by helping distribute workload, offering case coverage where needed, and improving overall capacity within the unit.

The training team also continues to assess staff strengths, identify professional development needs, and facilitate cross-program collaboration. Peer learning opportunities offered throughout November helped build shared understanding across teams and supported a stronger sense of workforce cohesion.

Policy & Procedure

The QA team continues to refine internal practice tools, step-by-step guidance documents, and policy clarification resources to support consistency and reduce documentation errors. Throughout November, QA partnered closely with supervisors to identify areas where additional clarification or revised processes are needed based on staff feedback. These ongoing adjustments help ensure that policy aligns with practical casework realities and supports stronger decision-making across programs.

Data Utilization

CQI continues to expand the agency's use of data to guide decision-making, strengthen accountability, and support operational transparency. This month, the team reviewed program trends, monitored timeliness and compliance benchmarks, and worked with supervisors to ensure consistent, accurate data entry. Work also continues on developing user-friendly reporting dashboards that allow supervisors to quickly identify trends, support staff, and improve daily workflow management.

Summary

Throughout the month, our Training and CQI teams continued working together to build a culture of continuous learning, support, and improvement. From comprehensive onboarding to enhanced data utilization and targeted QA support, these efforts ensure staff have the tools, guidance, and resources they need to succeed. The addition of extra CPS positions provides further reinforcement to frontline workers, helping stabilize workloads and strengthen overall service delivery. Together, these initiatives continue to bolster our workforce, enhance retention, and 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 69 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 October, we received four new guardianship referrals, reflecting sustained demand in this area.

Special Assistance In-Home (SAIH)
We are serving 53 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 October, 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 October, we received 34 new APS reports, of which 19 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 7 outreach assessments, made 11 service referrals, and handled 4 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.