Social Services

Annual Report: 2025

Message from the Director

As we reflect on 2025, I am proud of the continued dedication and adaptability demonstrated by the Burke County Department of Social Services team. This year marked a significant period of transition and progress, particularly in our implementation of new federal legislation and our alignment with North Carolina's statewide foster care plan.

Our staff worked diligently to translate policy into practice, strengthening processes, enhancing accountability, and ensuring that children and families receive consistent, high-quality services. The transition to the statewide foster care plan has been a major undertaking, requiring coordination, training, and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children in care. I am proud of how our team has embraced this work with professionalism and purpose.

At the same time, we have remained focused on our core mission, supporting vulnerable individuals and families, promoting stability, and partnering with our community to meet evolving needs.

I am deeply grateful to our staff, community partners, and the Board of Commissioners for their continued support. Together, we are building a stronger, more responsive system of care for Burke County.

Sincerely,

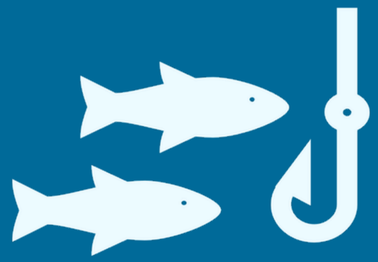
Korey Fisher-Wellman, Director
Burke County Department of Social Services

BURKECOUNTY

DSS by the Numbers



199 full-time employees
10 part-time employees
10 PRN staff



427
fishing license waivers issued in 2025



164 voter registration applications submitted to the County Board of Elections in 2025



8,567 Medicaid transportation trip referrals in 2025

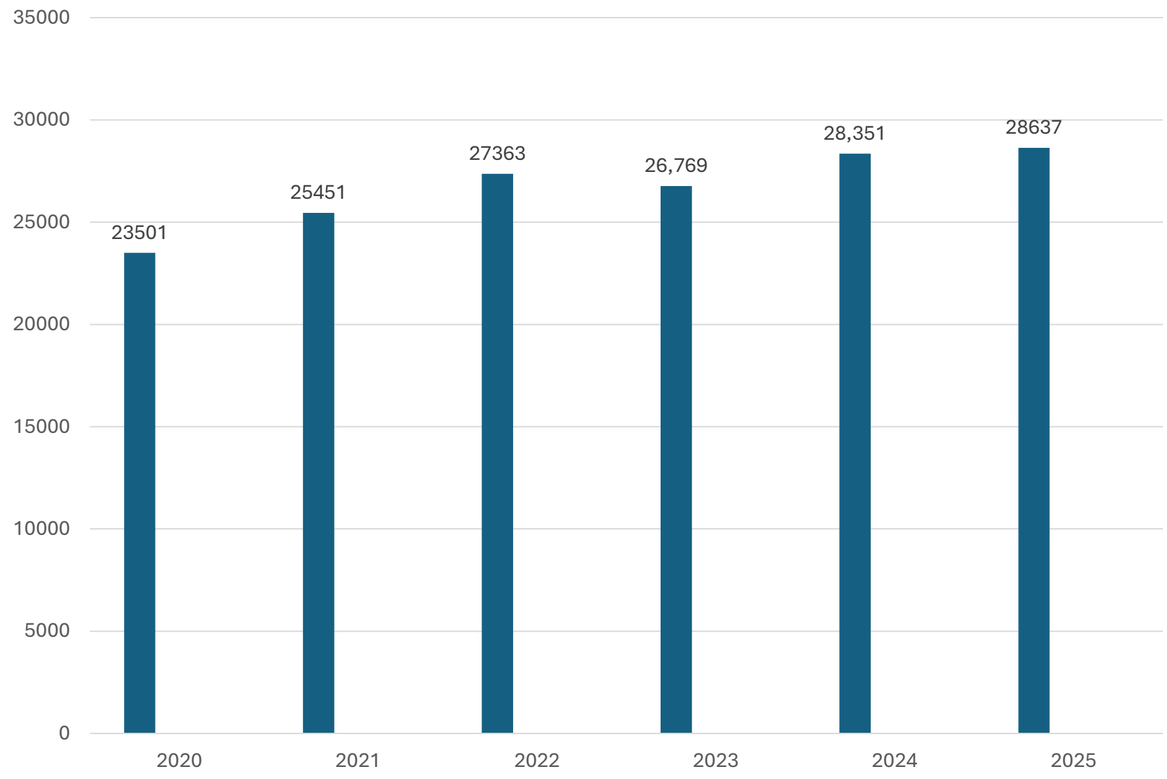
BURKECOUNTY

Medicaid provides health care coverage for people with low incomes. There are programs for children, pregnant women, adults and people who are blind or with disabilities. Through Medicaid Expansion, people ages 19 through 64 may receive health care coverage.

Updates in 2025

- Approximately 400 Medicaid applications are taken each month.
- Approximately 2000 Medicaid re-certifications are normally completed monthly,
- Workers had to learn new policy as it pertained to Foster Care. (CFSP)
- County Department of Social Services continues receive 75% federal reimbursement for the administration of Medicaid eligibility functions.
- A Medicaid Caseworker is designated to continues to offer services at Blue Ridge Health Care.
- The County is subject to numerous audits including the PERM-Payment error rate measurement, MEQC- Medicaid Eligibility Quality Control, County Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CPA conducts the case audits), Statewide Single Audit, and Recipient Eligibility Determination Audit (REDA). Errors can result in paybacks to the county.
- 35% of Burke County receive some type of Medicaid.

Active Medicaid Participants



Food and Nutrition Services (FNS)

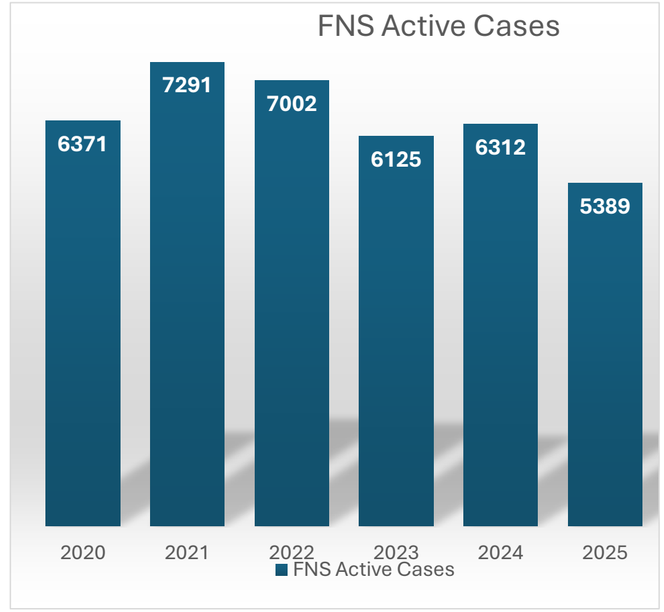
Food and Nutrition Services is a federal food assistance program that provides low-income families the ability to purchase food they need for a nutritionally adequate diet. Benefits are issued via Electronic Benefit Transfer cards (EBT cards).

Households with school age children who received free or reduced lunch are given additional supplements. Sun-bucks are sent out in the summer. Although the applications are taken through the schools, DSS manages the card distribution.

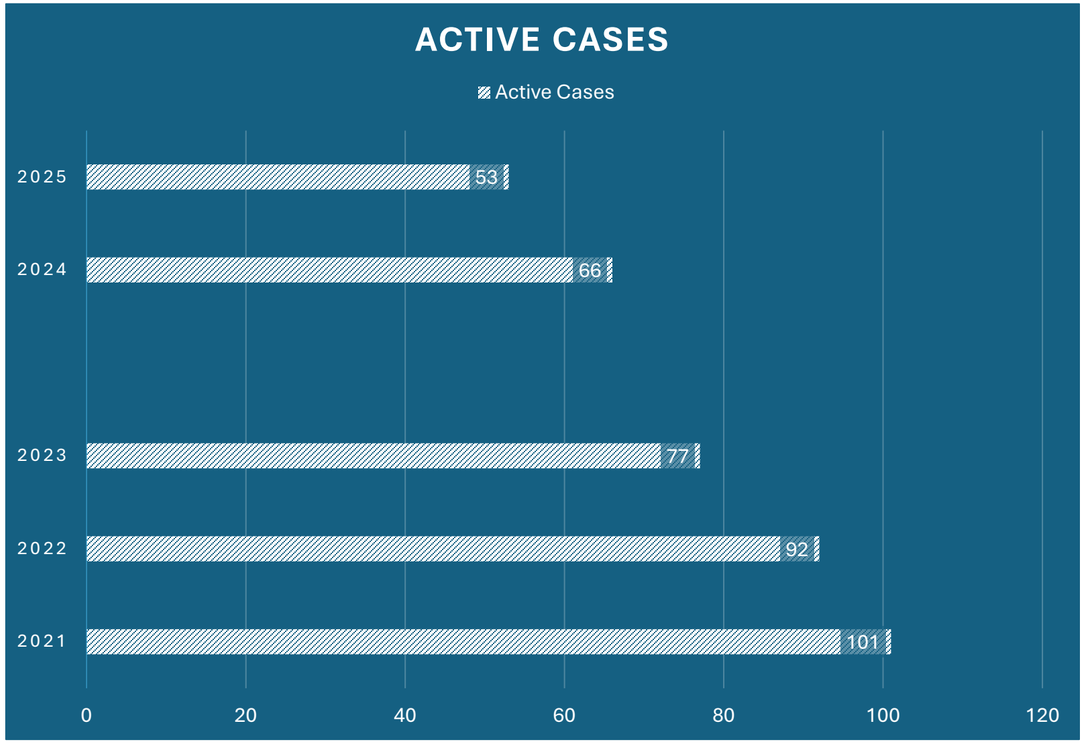
Food and Nutrition Services are an important public-private partnership that helps families afford a basic diet, generates business for retailers, and boosts local economies. Participants purchase groceries with FNS benefits from superstores to farmers markets. Because most households redeem their monthly benefits quickly and because the program helps struggling households purchase adequate food, FNS is one of the most effective forms of local economic support for our community.



YEAR	BENEFITS	PARTICIPANTS
2018	$15,257,818	12,467
2019	$12,979,179	10,397
2020	$28,071,332	12,456
2021	$37,394,876	14,146
2022	$39,812,325	13,403
2023	$27,732,339	11,863
2024	$24,640,383	12,193
2025	$21,937,285	10269



WORK FIRST CASH ASSISTANCE & EMPLOYMENT SERVICES



- North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, called **Work First**, is based on the premise that parents have a responsibility to support themselves and their children. Through Work First, parents can get short-term training and other services to help them become employed and self-sufficient, but the responsibility is theirs. Most families have two years to move off Work First assistance. Work First provides a monthly check and Medicaid. Applicants must have a related child under the age of 18 living in the home and be a U.S. citizen or legal alien. The resource limit is $3,000.00.

Work First Recipients are required to participate in work activities such as employment, job search and volunteering to obtain work experience.

The Employment Services case workers have constant contact with the participants to assist in eliminating barriers to finding employment. They arrange transportation, day care services, and enroll the participants in classes such as GED or Human Resource Development.

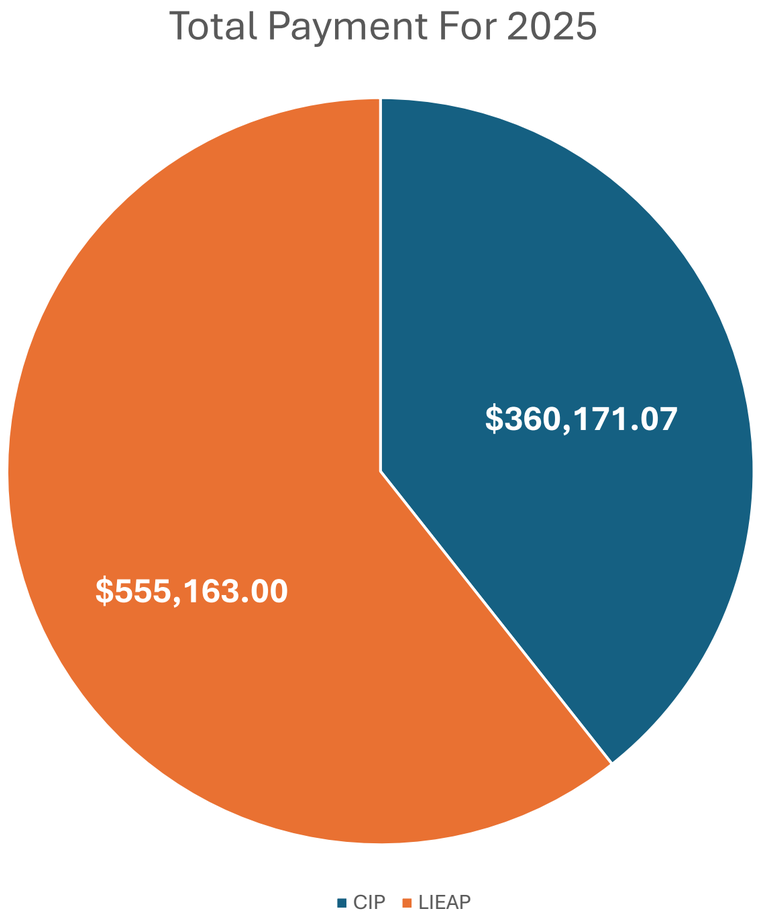
This unit averaged 75 contacts with recipients monthly, which includes, phone calls and office visits. Policy requires case managers have contact with Employment Services recipients every 4 weeks to complete an updated Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA).

Telephonic signatures can be taken at application , however the recertification has to be in person.

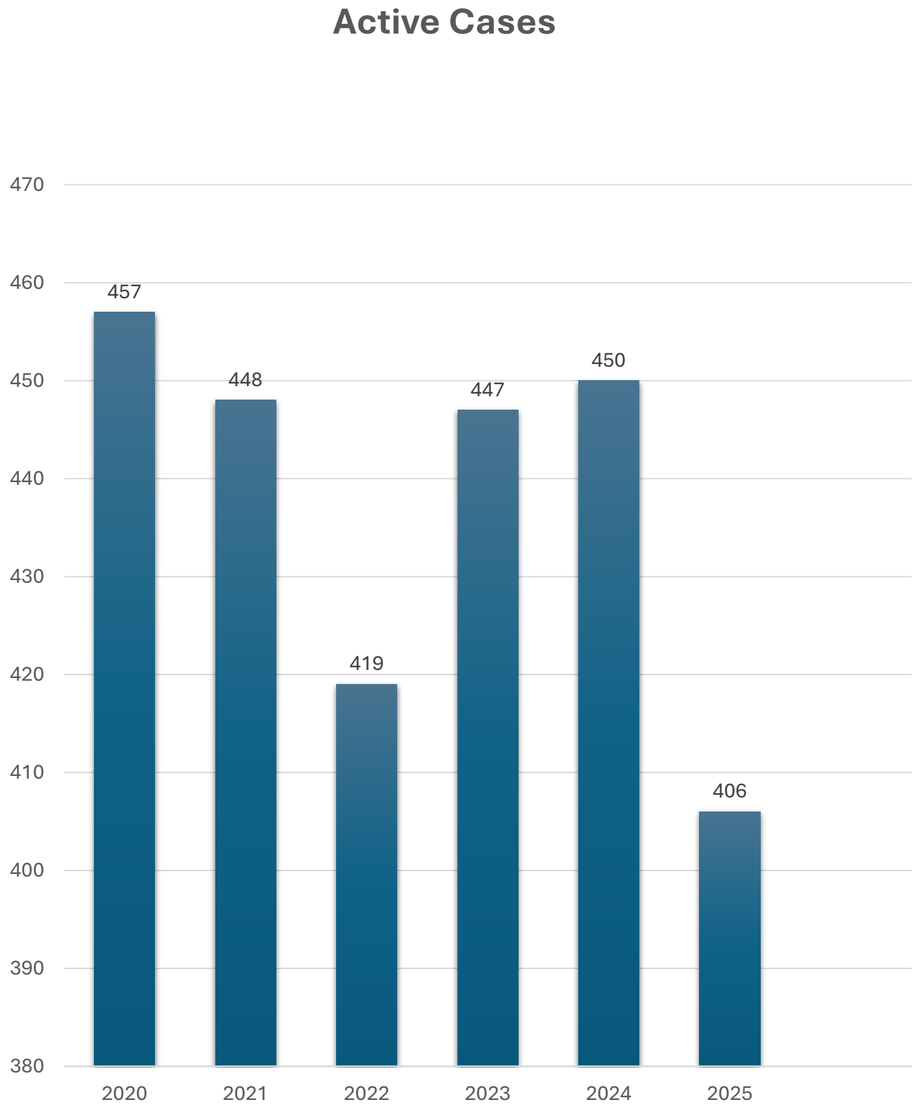
ENERGY PROGRAMS

The **Crisis Intervention Program**, also known as CIP is designed to assist families with heating or cooling emergencies by paying utility bills or deposits and buying oil or wood. Funds can also be used to pay for temporary shelter, home repairs, and purchases of air conditioners, up to $600.00 a fiscal year. Eligibility is based on income, citizenship and the existence of a heating and cooling crisis. Total Number of CIP Applications processed 01/1/2025-12/31/2025 was 1994.

The **Low-Income Energy Assistance Program**, also known as LIEAP, provides a one-time vendor payment to help eligible families pay their heating costs. This program is 100% funded by the Federal Government. Applications are taken from December through March, or until funds are exhausted. Applicants must meet vulnerability, income, resource, and citizenship requirements. Payments are made directly to the vendor. Total Number of LIEAP Applications processed 01/1/2025- 12/31/2025 was 1450.



CHILD CARE SUBSIDY
(HELP PAYING FOR CHILD CARE)



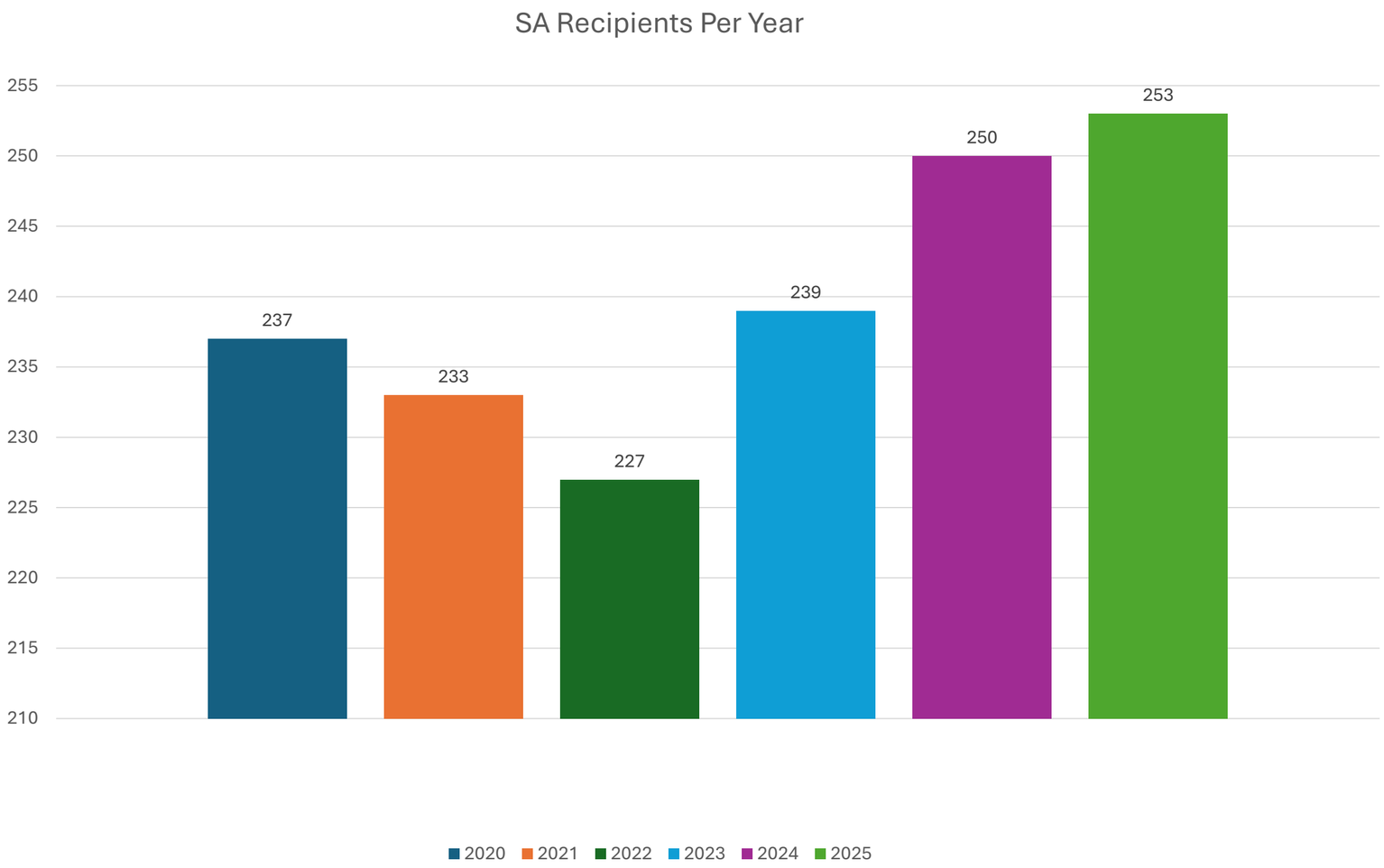
- Families may be eligible to receive childcare assistance if:
- Working or attempting to find work
- In school or in a job training program
- Child is receiving child protective services
- Child needs care to support child welfare services or if your family is experiencing a crisis
- Child has developmental needs
- There are 406 cases in Burke County, serving 432 children.

July 2024- June 2025

Total Allocations $3,371,720



SPECIAL ASSISTANCE



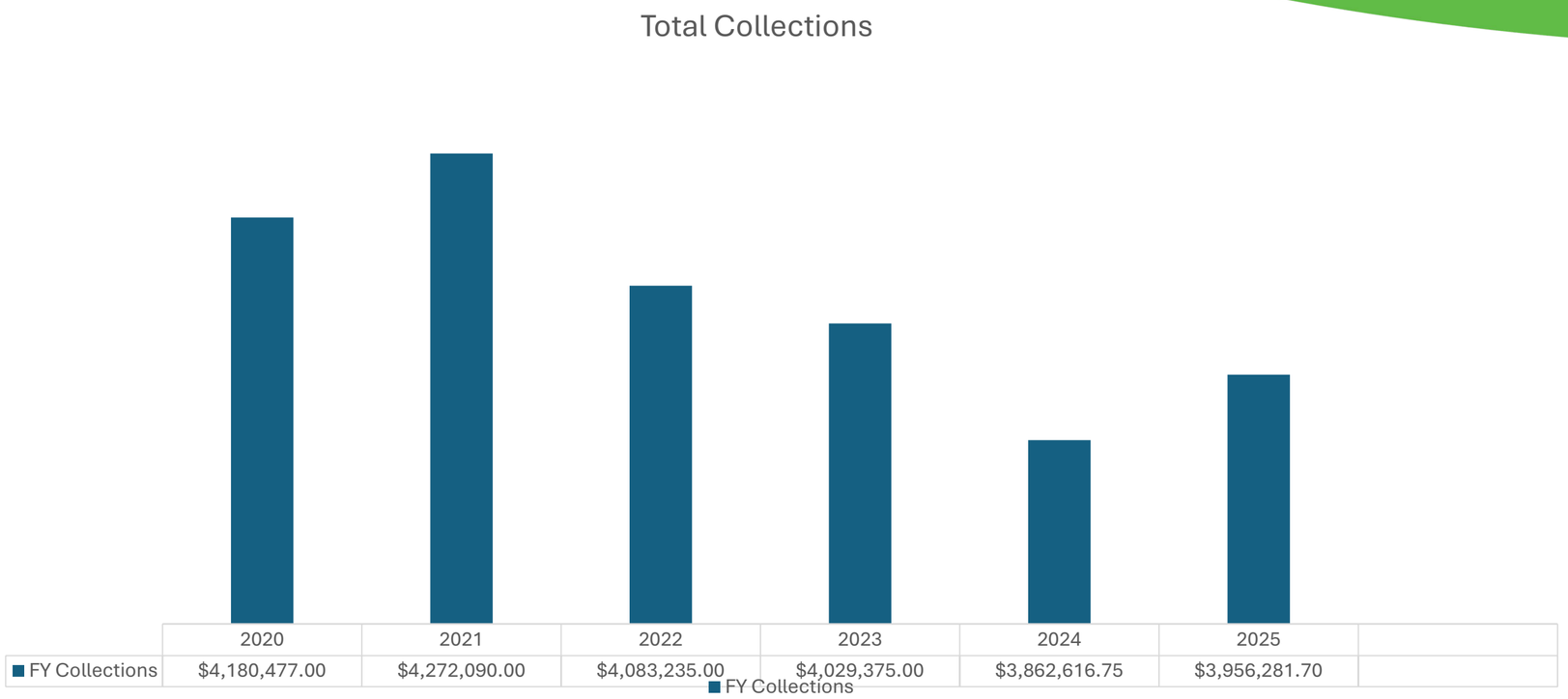
State/County **Special Assistance (SA)** is a state supplement that pays cash benefits to eligible recipients who reside in licensed facilities authorized to receive SA payments.

The Special Assistance In-Home (SA/IH) program provides low-income, North Carolina residents who are eligible for Medicaid with a monthly cash benefit to help them remain living in their homes. The SA payment is funded by 50% county dollars and 50% state dollars.

SA payments are now issued electronically through NCFAST to a bank account chosen by the recipient and/or facility.



CHILD SUPPORT



▶**Child Support Services** provides for the establishment and enforcement of voluntary and court-ordered support obligations (financial and/or health insurance coverage) owed by absent parents for the care of their children. During the past fiscal year, Veritas Child Support staff collected a total of $3,956,281.70



Burke County contracts with Veritas to provide Child Support Services. The partnership started as of February 2020.

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As of June 2025, the Child Support Case count was 2220.

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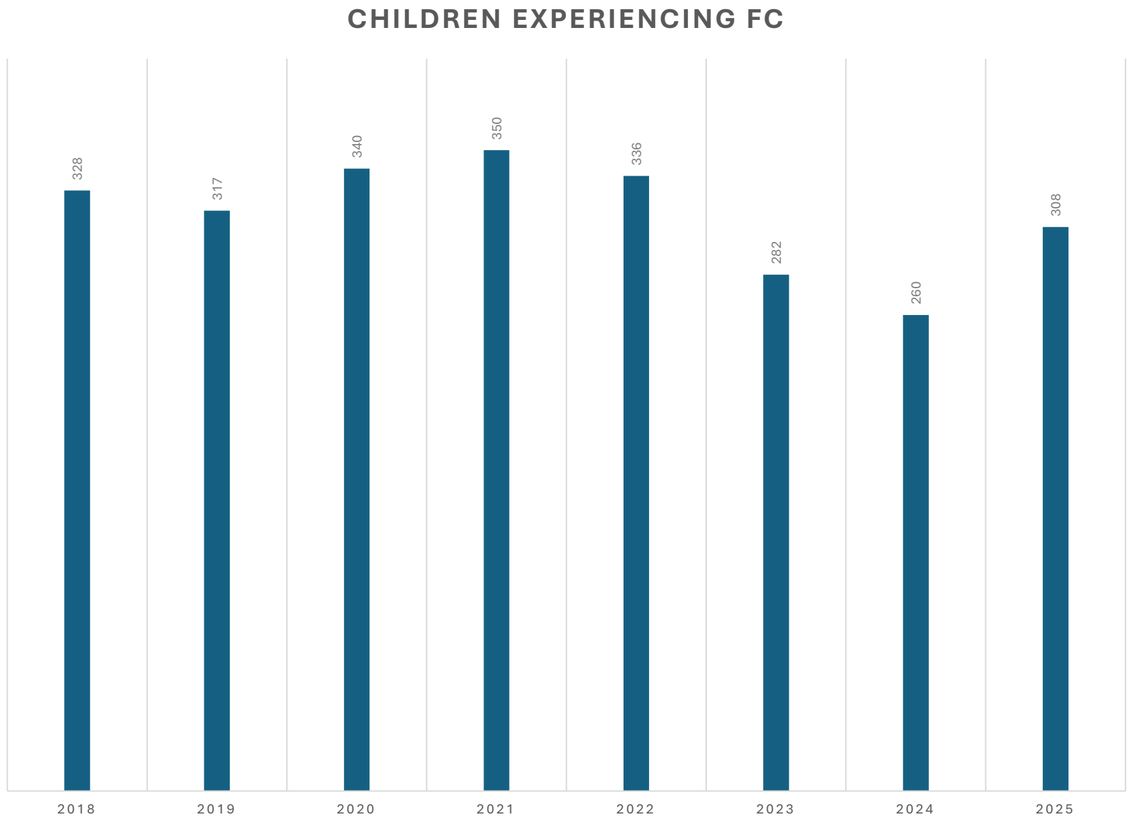
By the end of the year Burke's performance improvements had moved the County's overall ranking to 51st place statewide.

→

State Representative, Veritas Office Manager, Veritas Executive Vice President and Program Administrator meet monthly to go over all the performance measures and discuss any concerns.

PERMANENCY PLANNING

Permanency Planning (Foster care) services are provided to children who must be separated from their parents/caretakers.



In 2025, 308 children in Burke County experienced Foster care.

Permanency for these children can be achieved through one of the following options:

- ❑Reunification
- ❑Custody
- ❑Guardianship
- ❑Adoption



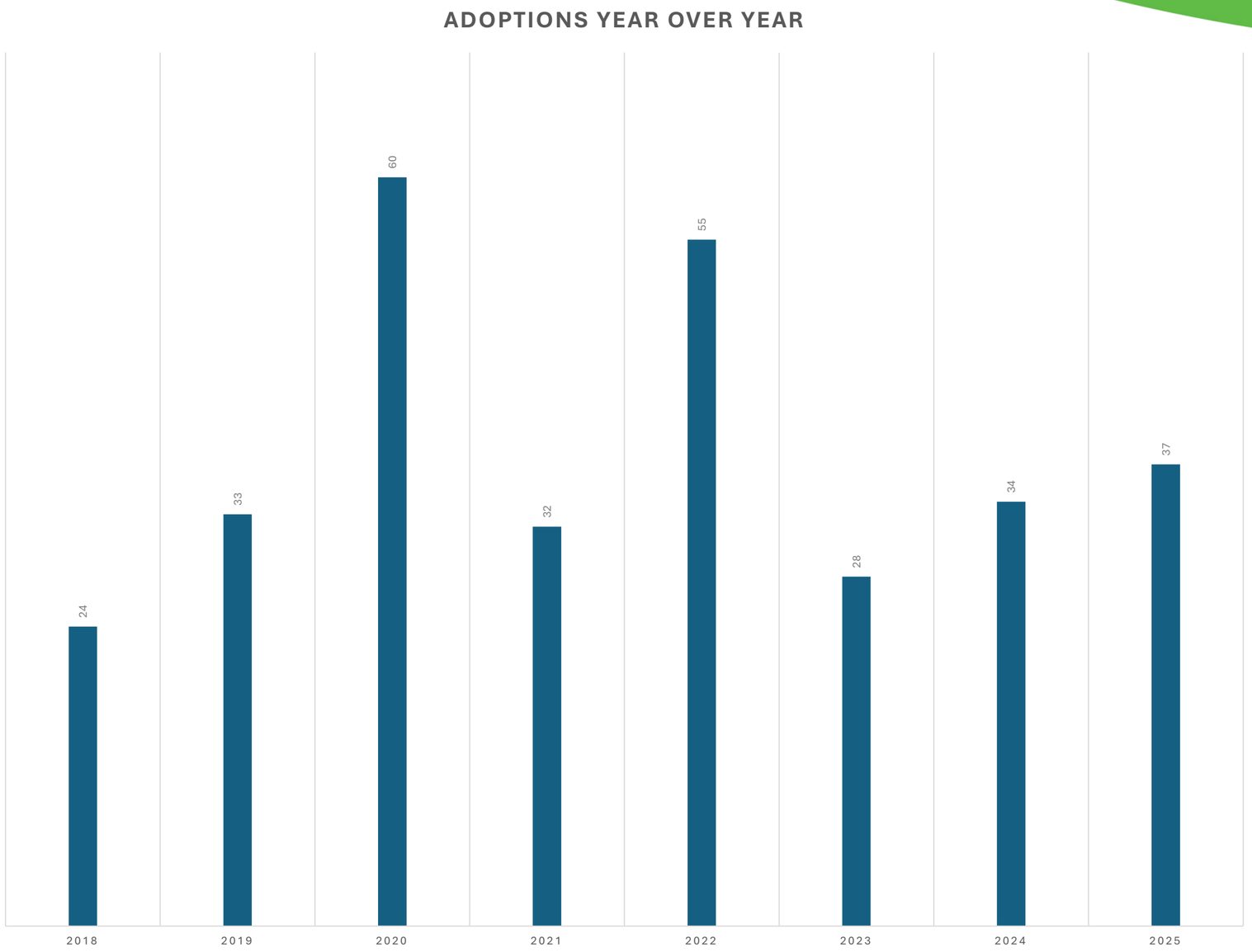
ENTERING VS EXITING CUSTODY



Entering Custody vs Exiting Custody

In 2025,126 children entered the Department's custody, while 105 children exited the Department's custody and achieved some level of permanency.

ADOPTIONS



"Adoption is the method provided by law to establish the legal relationship of parent and child **between persons who are not so related by birth, with the same mutual rights and obligations** that exist between children and their birth parent.

In 2025, Burke County assisted 37 children in reaching their goal of adoption.



CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Child Protective Services (CPS)
Mandated Services to Protect Children and Support Families

Purpose of CPS:
•Legally mandated, non-voluntary services for families.
•Specializes in maltreated children (abused, neglected, dependent) and those at imminent risk of harm.
•Aims to protect children and improve the abilities of parents/caregivers.

Key Responsibilities of CPS

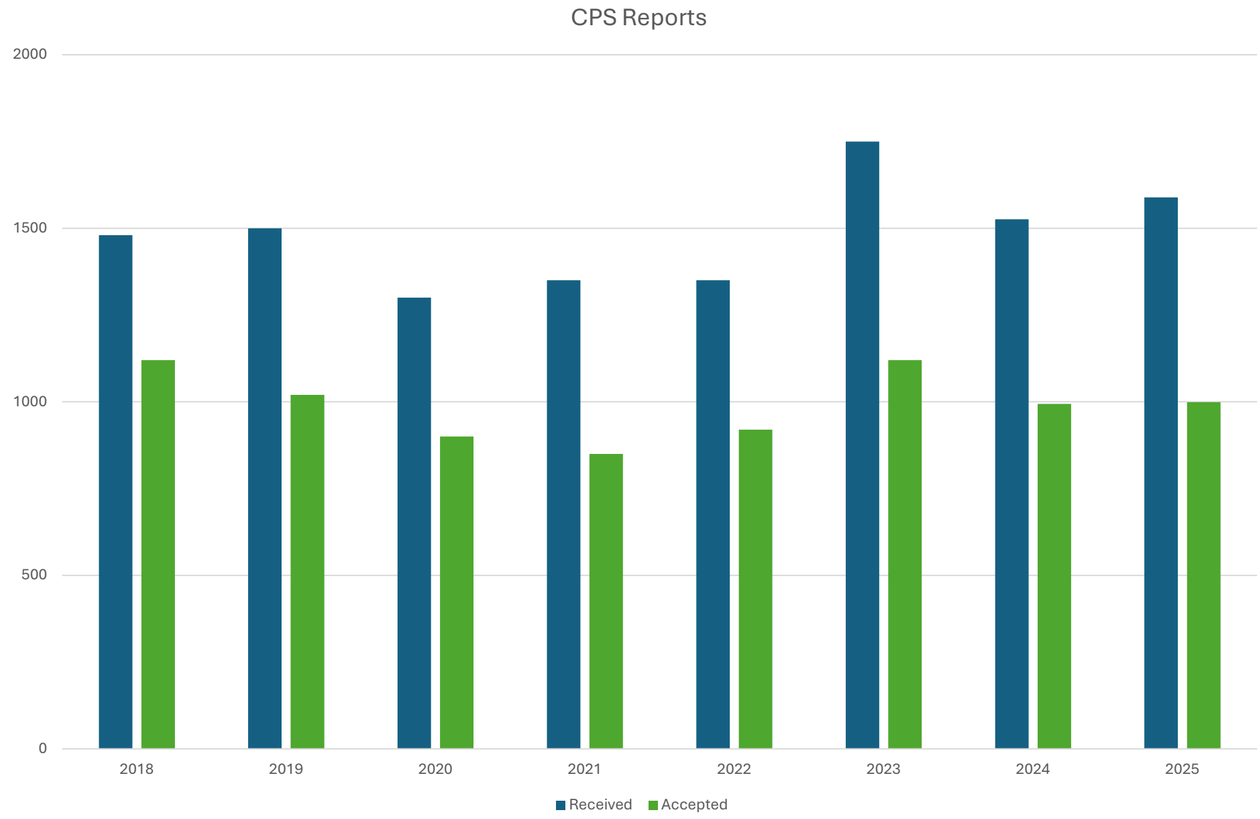
1.Receiving & Documenting Reports:
- •Screen and assess reports of child abuse, neglect, and dependency.
- •Two-level decision-making process for allegations.

2.Investigations & Family Assessments:
- •Conduct thorough investigations and assess family dynamics.

3.In-home Case Management & Support:
- •Provide intensive services to remedy safety issues and support children in their home or temporary placement.

4.Coordinating Community & Agency Services:
- •Monitor and coordinate services from community partners and agencies.

5.Court Involvement:
- •Petition the court for child removal or continued intervention if safety concerns persist.



- In 2025, Burke County DSS received 1,589 reports of alleged child abuse, neglect, and dependency. The agency accepted 999 of these reports for investigations and assessments as the information provided to the agency met the statutory definitions of child abuse, neglect, or dependency.

CPS IN-HOME SERVICES

CPS In-Home Services
Supporting Families and Child Safety

Primary Goal:

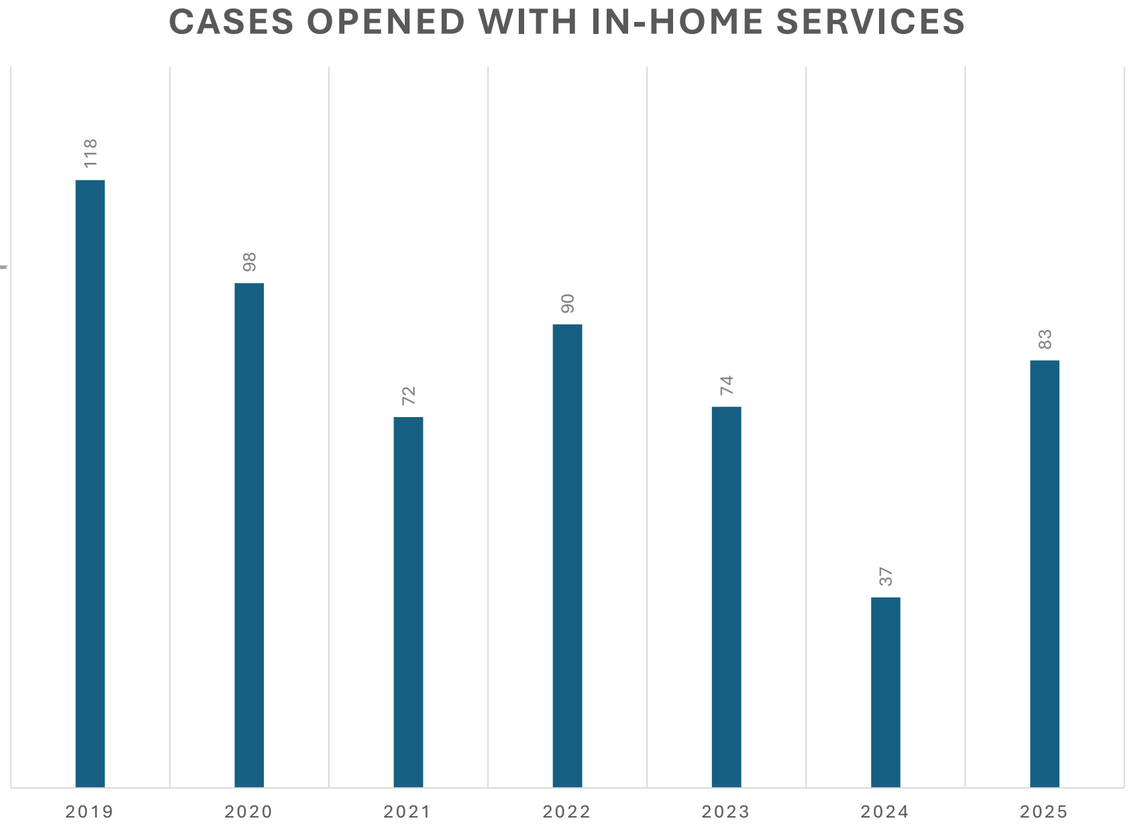
- Support families in maintaining children in their home.
- Eliminate safety concerns and reduce the risk of future maltreatment.
- Achieved through family engagement, support systems, and service providers.

Key Objectives:

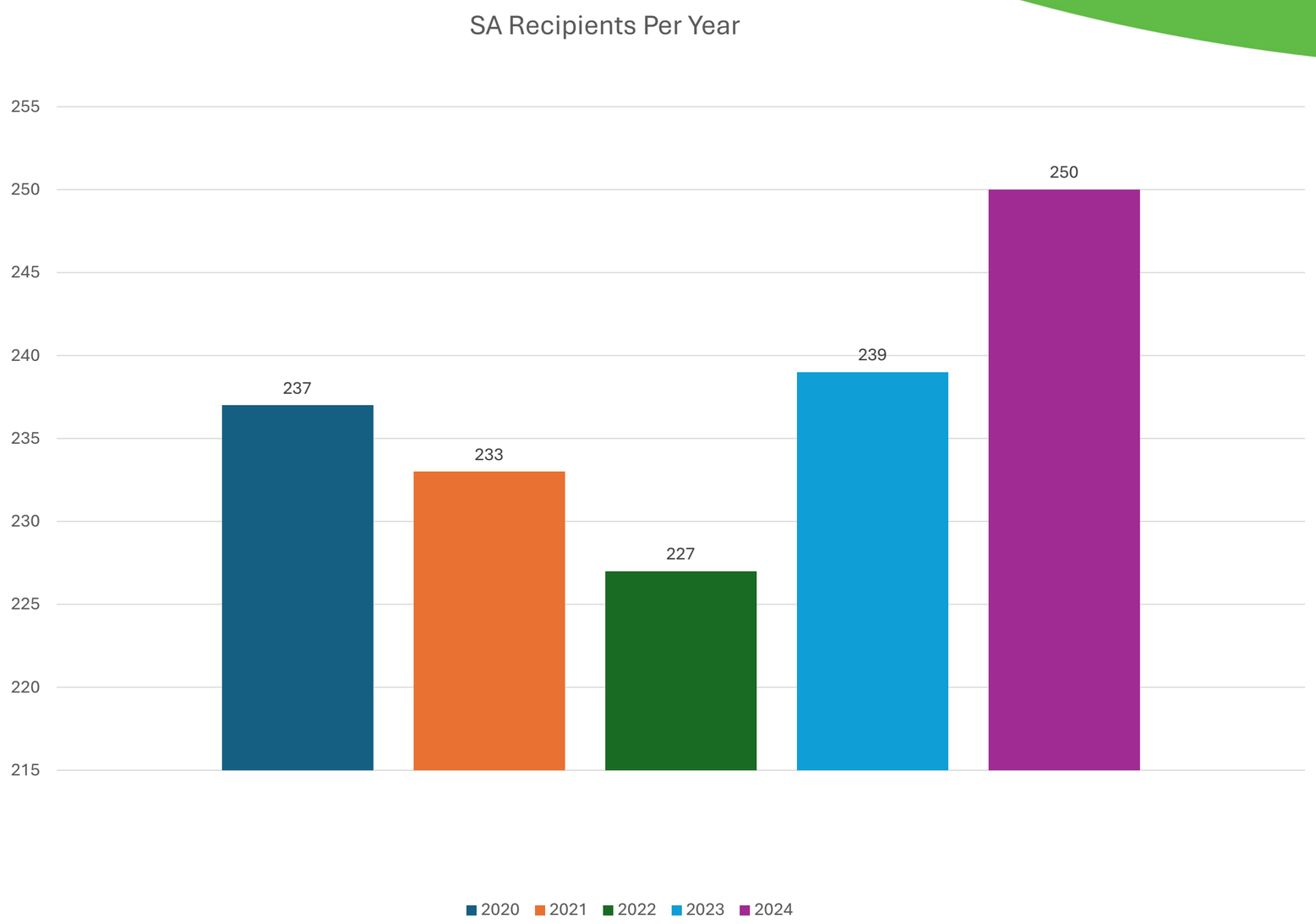
- **Address Child Safety & Protection**
- **Preserve Families & Maintain Children Safely at Home**
- **Prevent Further Abuse by Strengthening Family Capacity**

CPS In-Home Services Characteristics:

1. **Intensive Services**
   - Provided to families with greater needs; less intensive for families with fewer needs.
2. **Culturally Sensitive Services**
   - Delivered within the family's community context.
3. **Enhanced Worker Identification of Safety & Risks**
   - Helps county child welfare workers assess safety and risks.
4. **Family Engagement**
   - Involves children, youth, and families in planning, improving outcomes of safety and well-being.
5. **Encouraging Support Networks**
   - Promotes the development of support networks to help families cope with future challenges.



SPECIAL ASSISTANCE



State/County **Special Assistance (SA)** is a state supplement that pays cash benefits to eligible recipients who reside in licensed facilities authorized to receive SA payments.

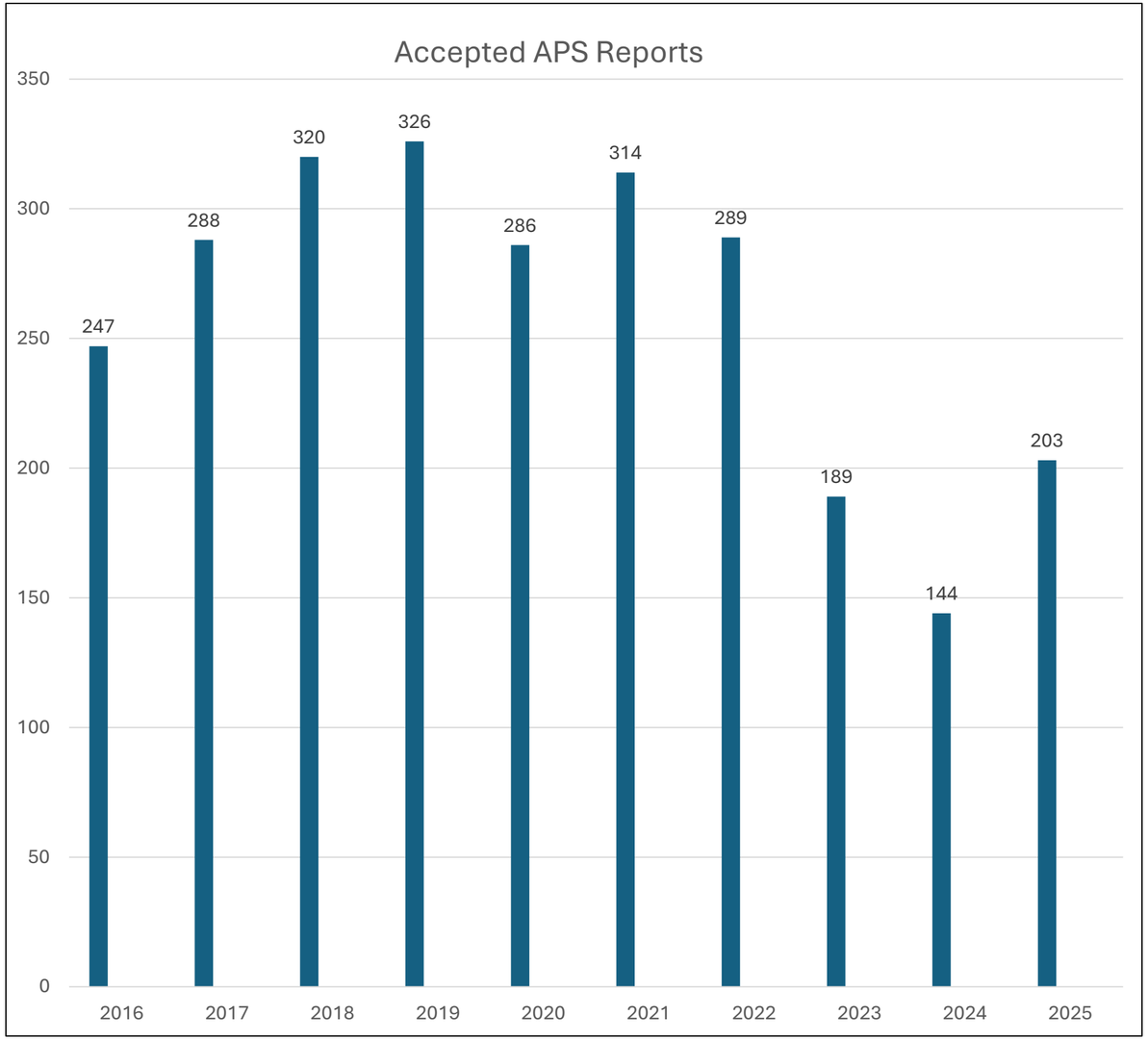
The Special Assistance In-Home (SA/IH) program provides low-income, North Carolina residents who are eligible for Medicaid with a monthly cash benefit to help them remain living in their homes.
All SA In Home case management is 100% reimbursable by MAC (Medicaid Administrative Claiming) Funding

SA payments are now issued electronically through NCFAST to a bank account chosen by the recipient and/or facility.



ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

- Adults with disabilities may be vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. **Adult Protective Services (APS)** is a unit within DSS that receives and evaluates reports to determine whether disabled adults are in need of protective services. Disabled adults reported to be abused, neglected or exploited and in need of protective services are eligible to receive this service regardless of income.



GUARDIANSHIP

- There are times (due to mental health issues, developmental disabilities, medical issues, etc.) when an adult is declared incompetent to make their own decisions by the court. These incompetent adults are appointed a Guardian of the Person to assist them with their decision-making and to ensure that all of their needs are met. In 2025, Burke County DSS served 71 individuals as **Guardians of the Person**. The Department gained 30 new adult wards through court involvement in 2025.

- The Department established a contract in late 2023 with Hope for the Future for 17 slots to assist in the overall case management of wards. In 2024, 17 wards went to Hope for the Future, and they are currently managing 17 wards in 2025



2025- average of 57 individuals

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ADULT HOME SPECIALIST

•This service is a mandated service inspecting and monitoring the operations of local adult care homes and family care homes.

•The **Adult Home Specialists** assess the facilities' compliance with rules and regulations set forth by DHSR. Areas inspected and monitored include resident rights, administration of medication, staff qualifications, and housekeeping. Further, they are responsible for ensuring safe and sanitary living conditions.

•The **Adult Home Specialists** are also responsible for conducting formal investigations into complaints received by the agency about concerns related to one or more of the licensing rules and regulations.

•Burke County DSS has two full-time Adult Services Social Workers who serve as Adult Home Specialists for the County. In 2025, there were 6 Adult Care Homes(but one closed during the year), leaving 5 Adult Care Homes and 12 Family Care Homes located in Burke County. There is also one local Adult Day Care Program that is monitored by the Adult Home Specialists.

•In 2025, the Adult Home Specialists conducted 114 investigations and 76 routine monitoring visits.

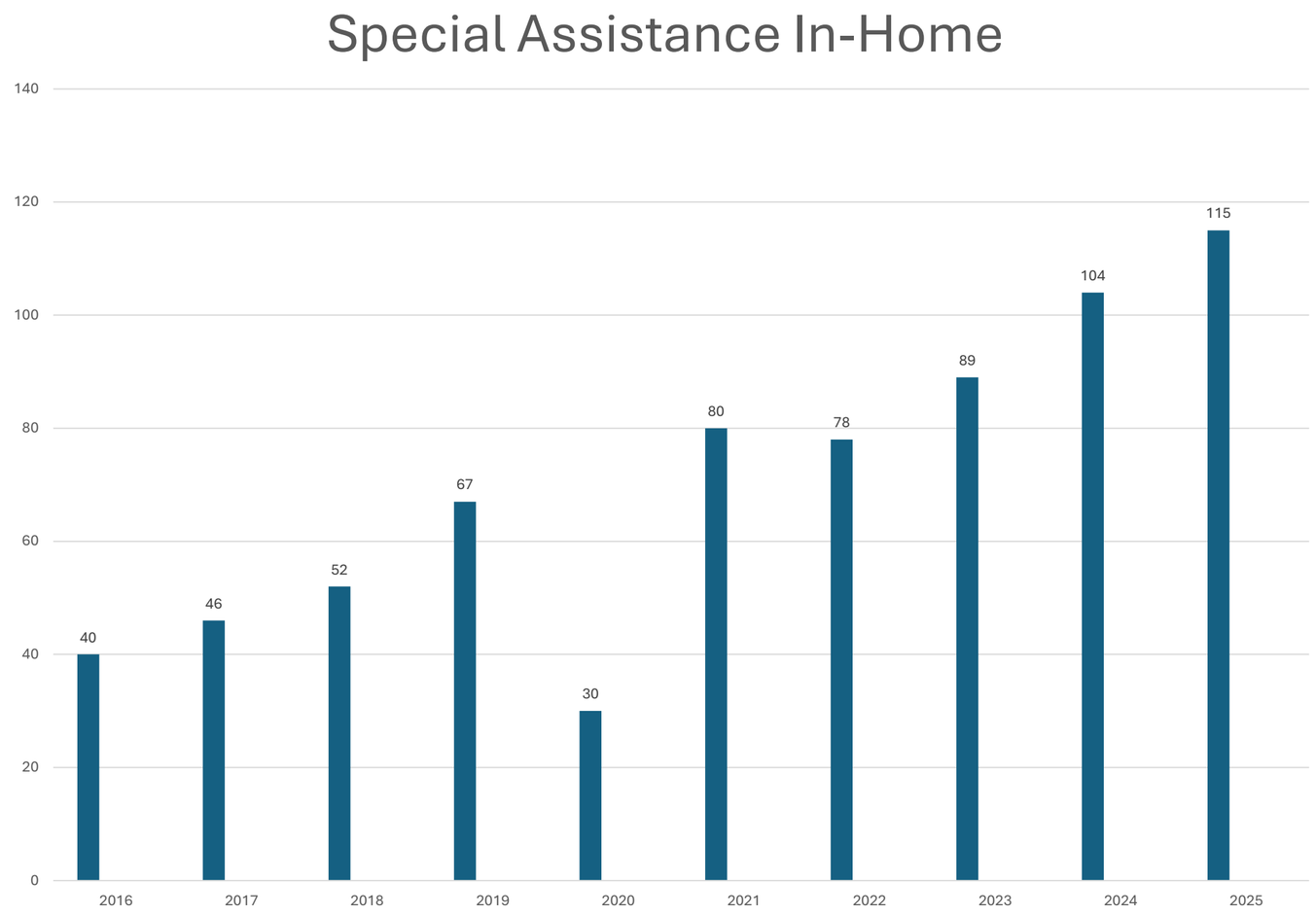
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SPECIAL ASSISTANCE IN-HOME

The **Special Assistance In-Home Program (SA/IH)** is a mandated service that provides an alternative to placement in an Adult Care Home (ACH) for individuals who desire and are able to live at home safely with additional support.

In 2025, DSS served 115 adult individuals with the SA In-Home Service. An average of 52 Adults were managed by DSS, and 58 Adults were managed by the TCLI Program (Transitions to Community Living Initiatives).

SA/IH is now an entitlement program, and as a result, these numbers are growing monthly. The State mandates no waiting list for individuals needing this service.



COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

- CAP (Community Alternatives Program) is a Medicaid-covered program that allows an individual to receive assistance with activities of daily living in their home. This enables the individual to remain in their home safely as opposed to residing in a Nursing Home.
- CAP slots are now regionalized, and Burke County is in the Southwest Region catchment area along with the following counties:
  - Anson, Cabarrus, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Moore, Polk, Richmond, Rutherford, Stanly, Union
- Current Stats for this region are as follows:
  - 2, 515 total number of slots in this regional slot pool
  - 2,509 slots that are currently filled
  - 1,267 Total number on the southwest regional waitlist
  - None of those on the regional waitlist has a priority
- Burke Co. is currently serving 132 of these slots



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THANK YOU

Questions?

