Board Members
John Day, Chair
Brian Barrier
Geronimo Blancaflor
Maureen Schwind
Nancy Wood

Korey Fisher-Wellman
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MINUTES
BURKE COUNTY ADVISOARY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
REGULAR BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, April 7, 2026
10am

Board Present: 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

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Maureen Schwind called the meeting to order. Board members, DSS leadership, and staff introduced themselves for the benefit of new board member, Geronimo "Ron" Blancaflor. Ron shared personal background information, including his military service, relocation to North Carolina, and family background.

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Minutes

The agenda and meeting minutes from December were approved as amended, by Brian Barrier and Geronimo Blancaflor including moving one agenda item to the beginning of the meeting.

3. Annual DSS Overview and Department Reports

Agency Overview

DSS leadership reviewed the agency's annual report and provided an overview of operations for calendar year 2025.

Staffing

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

Additional Services Provided

- 427 fishing licenses processed
- 164 voter registrations completed
- Over 8,000 Medicaid transportation referrals facilitated

4. Economic Services Report

Medicaid

Amanda Grady reviewed Medicaid services and noted:

- Approximately 400 Medicaid applications processed monthly
- Approximately 2,000 recertifications completed monthly
- Medicaid expansion continues serving adults ages 19–64
- About 35% of Burke County residents receive Medicaid
- More than 28,000 residents currently participate

The department also manages several state and federal Medicaid audits annually.

Food and Nutrition Services

Food and Nutrition Services (formerly food stamps) distributed over $21 million in benefits during 2025.

Program statistics included:

- 10,269 participants
- 5,389 active cases at year-end

Staff discussed increased benefit levels during COVID-19, including maximum allotments and supplemental payments.

Work First / TANF

The Work First program continues assisting families with employment readiness, transportation, childcare, and education support.

Key points:

- Only 53 active cases remained at year-end
- Benefit levels remain low and unchanged, reducing participation
- Program emphasis remains on self-sufficiency and employment

Energy Assistance Programs

Amanda Grady reviewed:

- Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) – helps alleviate heating and cooling emergencies - up to $600 per calendar year. We processed 1,994 applications in 2025.
- Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) – Offers a one-time payment, sent directly to the vendor. We processed 1,450 applications during 2025.

Child Care Assistance

This program helps make childcare affordable. 432 children were helped this year. DSS continues coordinating with Smart Start and other community partners to support childcare needs. Amanda Grady clarified that DSS and Smart Start programs operate separately but communicate to avoid duplication of services.

Special Assistance Programs

Amanda Grady reviewed Special Assistance eligibility for individuals residing in licensed facilities or receiving in-home support services. Funding is shared between county and state sources.

Child Support Services

DSS continues contracting child support services through Veritas.

Highlights included:

- 2,220 active child support cases
- Nearly $4 million collected in child support during 2025
- Significant statewide performance improvement since outsourcing began in 2020

Amanda Grady reported the partnership has improved efficiency and reduced operational costs.

5. Child Welfare Services

Foster Care and Permanency

Will Winters reported:

- 308 children experienced foster care placement during 2025
- 126 foster care entries
- 105 exits from foster care

Exit outcomes included reunification, guardianship, custody, and adoption.

Adoptions

- 37 children achieved permanency through adoption during the year

Will Winters acknowledged increased caseloads but praised staff resilience and dedication.

Child Protective Services (CPS)

CPS received over 1,500 reports of abuse, neglect, or dependency in 2025, with nearly 1,000 reports accepted for assessment.

Amber Conley explained that statewide policy changes significantly increased:

- Immediate response requirements
- 24-hour response investigations
- Overall workload demands

Examples were provided showing how revised definitions now classify more incidents as physical abuse requiring urgent response.

Despite increased pressures, supervisors and staff continue meeting mandated response timeframes.

In-Home Services

Amber Conley reported 83 in-home service cases during 2025. Additional statewide policy changes are expected with the next phase of the state case management system rollout.

6. Adult Services Report

Adult Protective Services

DSS received 203 Adult Protective Services reports involving allegations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

Guardianship

The agency currently serves as guardian for 71 individuals deemed incompetent by the court.

Chazlyn Thomas noted:

- Increased numbers of younger wards with significant mental health needs
- Longer-term guardianship responsibilities
- Continued partnership with Hope for the Future to assist with guardianship services

Adult Home Specialist Program

Staff completed:

- 114 investigations
- 76 routine monitoring visits

These activities ensure compliance within adult care homes and adult daycare facilities.

Special Assistance In-Home Program

This program provides cash assistance to help eligible individuals remain safely in their homes rather than entering institutional care.

Community Alternatives Program (CAP)

The CAP program served 132 individuals by coordinating home- and community-based support services.

7. Foster Care and Service Expansion Discussion

Board members and leadership discussed opportunities to improve foster care outcomes through partnerships with outside service providers.

Discussion topics included:

- Recruiting additional foster homes
- Expanding behavioral health services
- Reducing barriers for families working toward reunification
- Improving access to assessments and support services
- Reducing costly residential placements

Leadership emphasized the potential for improved permanency outcomes and reduced costs through expanded local services.

8. Staff Recognition and Workforce Updates

Social Work Appreciation Month

Leadership recognized staff during Social Work Appreciation Month through:

- Thank you cards
- Meals and snacks
- Staff appreciation activities
- Employee recognition awards

Board members also expressed appreciation for staff dedication.

Staffing and Recruitment

Amanda Grady reported recent hiring successes, including:

- Filling a long-vacant systems and compliance administrator position
- Strong applicant pools during recent hiring cycles
- Ongoing supervisor and lead-worker training initiatives

Additional staff wellness and morale activities included:

- Burnout reduction events
- Food and coffee trucks
- Seasonal appreciation activities

Retention Efforts

DSS is implementing a social worker career ladder program intended to:

- Improve retention
- Increase salary competitiveness
- Support long-term workforce stability

9. Agency Renovation Update

- Plans are close to being finalized
- Initial Staging Meetings
- County Manager met with staff regarding plans

10. Adjournment

Geronimo Blancaflor made a motion to adjourn the meeting.