



CHEROKEE COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
4800 West U.S. Highway 64, Murphy, NC 28906
828-837-7455

**Cherokee County Department of Social Services
Board Meeting
MEETING MINUTES
April 28, 2026**

I. Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Cherokee County Department of Social Services was duly held on April 28, 2026, at 5:11 P.M, at 4800 West Highway 64, Murphy, N.C. 28906.

Board Members Present:

Bo Phillips, Chair
Dr. Catherine Yost, Member
James Jallah, Member

Staff present:

Amanda T. McGee, DSS Director
Teri Palmer, QAS III
Wayde Lovingood, QAS III
Daunita Maennle, Adult Protective Services Supervisor
Mendy Lance, Adult Medicaid Supervisor
Michele Chastain, Family and Children Supervisor
Katrina Plemmons, Food and Nutrition Services Supervisor
Brandy Clonts, Administrative Officer II/Clerk to the Board

Public Forum:

None

II. Discussion and Adoption of Agenda

- **Motion to add *Commissioner Dr. Sue Ledford – County Commissioner Updates* as item V, strike NCACDSS Legislative Talking Points, and adopt agenda as amended:** Mr. James Jallah made a motion to adopt the amended agenda. Dr. Cathrine Yost seconded. All voted in favor.

III. Meeting Minutes

- **Motion to Approve Minutes:** Mr. James Jallah made a motion to approve March 17, 2026, meeting minutes. Dr. Catherine Yost seconded. All voted in favor.

IV. Public Comments

None.

V. Dr. Sue Ledford, District 4 Commissioner

A. HR 1 Budget Impacts 2026-2027

- Commissioner Sue Ledford began speaking to the CCDSS Board by asking, “What would you like to hear?” Chairman Bo Phillips informed the Commissioner that there are currently two open board positions that are commissioner appointed.
- Commissioner Ledford shared that the Commissioners intend to operate differently than in the past, with a more open, cohesive, and aligned approach that supports honest conversations. She noted that she is a data-driven individual and often focuses on performance metrics. She recognized that DSS tracks data and indicated that this level of consistency is not present across all Cherokee County agencies.
- She also referenced signage related to foster parents and expressed her assumption that additional foster homes are needed. She stated that she believes the Board of Commissioners can support recruitment and retention efforts in this area.
- Commissioner Ledford also discussed her role with Four Square, noting that Medicaid is not included in HOP services. She referenced grant opportunities, including a United Way of North Carolina grant focused on assisting individuals with transitioning into housing by providing support for upfront costs and limited home repairs. She also mentioned a Home Grant currently held by the organization that does not yet include Cherokee County but stated they are applying for funding that would extend services to the county.
- She reported that there is currently no waiting list for HUD services but identified the greatest challenge as the availability of housing. She encouraged anyone aware of vacant or unused homes to refer property owners to Four Square, noting that they have funds available to assist with preparing homes for market. She also stated that they often seek matching funds to help “ready” properties for sale.
- From a county perspective, Commissioner Ledford discussed the upcoming budget season and stated a desire to hear honest assessments of departmental needs. She noted there has been a verbal commitment from the Board of Commissioners that safety is a top priority. Board Member James Jallah added that safety should include both human resources and necessary materials. Commissioner Ledford agreed, stating that staffing is a critical component of safety and service delivery.

- She also indicated that Commissioners would conduct a deeper analysis of departmental needs and requested that agencies be prepared to present strategic plans.
- Chairman Phillips expressed concern regarding pay levels and suggested consideration of a pay adjustment to help reduce turnover. He noted that DSS employees undergo a nine-month probationary and intensive training period, and that many leave due to higher-paying opportunities elsewhere, including entry-level restaurant positions.
- Commissioner Ledford agreed that recruitment and retention across all Cherokee County departments is a significant concern.
- Director McGee by informing the Commissioner and Board that a Strategic Safety Plan Analysis was completed and initiated in August 2024. The agency has continued to implement safety improvements based on the recommendations of the plan and as the Commission Board approves the budget items. The current fiscal year budget includes additional items in the Safety Threat Analysis Strategic Plan aimed at moving forward the plan recommendations to improve safety features of the DSS building and grounds.

VI. Old Business

A. Turnover Related to Higher Pay

- Administrative Officer Brandy Clonts prepared two turnover rate reports, which were provided to all Board members and Commissioner Ledford. The reports included quarterly fiscal turnover rates, as well as the turnover rate for July 2025 through March 2026. Explanations for employee separations were included, with the majority citing acceptance of higher-paying positions with other counties or agencies such as Healthy Blue. Specifically, Director McGee noted that the turnover data for DSS for SFY 24-26 was 13%. For SFY 25-26, by Quarter the DSS turnover is: QT1= 7.2% ; QT2= 5.8% ; QT3 18.9% Cumulative for three quarters is 31.9% Director McGee noted that eight employees left for Healthy Blue due to higher salaries in the third quarter.
- Director McGee also informed the Board that all exit interviews have been compiled for review, covering FY 2024-2025, and July 2025 to present. The exit interviews consistently indicate that while employees are noting a supportive environment, employees are leaving primarily for higher pay opportunities. DSS will establish a Retention Committee that will review separation data and develop recommendations for strengthening retention.
- Director McGee noted that turnover leads to increased risk and worsening performance benchmarks in all programs. For example, turnover in Eligibility programs leads to increased case mistakes which increases audit findings, financial paybacks and loss of revenue. Turnover in social work

programs results in lingering cases, poor outcomes for children and vulnerable adults and could result in serious and significant case mistakes. Director McGee stated that (absolutely), turnover IS a safety concern for clients and staff.

- Eligibility Supervisors reported that they have been conducting internal quality assurance reviews within their units and have maintained a 0% error rate.
- IMS Chastain noted that other counties are recruiting CCDSS staff by offering higher salaries, making it difficult to retain employees in a high-stress environment at current pay levels. IMS Lance shared that her Adult Medicaid unit has strong longevity among staff. IMS Plemmons reported a mix of experienced and newer staff in her unit and shared a recent loss of a bilingual lead worker with nine years of experience. The employee accepted a position in another county as an Income Maintenance Supervisor at a higher starting salary than IMS Plemmons currently earns, despite her nearly 13 years of service with the agency.
- APS Supervisor Maennle stated that it typically takes approximately one year for staff to become fully effective in their roles without constant oversight, aside from the costs associated with recruitment and onboarding. She emphasized that staff turnover has significant consequences, particularly when experienced staff are lost. She further noted the mental and emotional impact of the work, referencing ongoing discussions at the state level regarding secondary trauma and decision fatigue.
- She added that the APS unit has been understaffed for over a year but is now fully staffed and expressed hope that this will reduce the need for regular overtime and weekend work. She also expressed concern regarding rumors (in the county) that county employee cost of living raises would be denied due to past DSS legal issues, clarifying that current DSS employees were not involved in those matters. She noted that other counties offer higher pay rates and emphasized appreciation for the dedication of current staff. She concluded that financial recognition would be meaningful and supportive of retention efforts.
- Director McGee stated that it is important for Commissioners to be present in meetings, as it provides a clearer understanding of operational realities. She noted that turnover represents a significant risk to the county, both in terms of financial impact and potential consequences for client safety.
- Director McGee explained that DSS state and federal regulations, laws and policies are firm with no room for leeway. When staff earn lower (much lower) salary than market value for the job, staff are tempted to leave due to the pressure of rigorous performance expectations and the ability to make more money in private agencies such as Healthy Blue, or in other counties.
- Director McGee stated the importance of building morale within teams while also maintaining expectations that employees meet established performance

standards. She further noted that CCDSS strives to maintain a “learning environment” and that we strive to train, support coach and teach new employees so that they will become satisfied and excel in their roles. She stated there is limited ability to accept repeated mistakes due to the nature of compliance requirements. Director McGee stated that DHHS training for social workers is wholly inadequate and inaccessible, and she noted that there is **no DHB sponsored training** for eligibility case workers. County DSS agencies must manage these functions with little to no support from the state.

VII. Management Reports

A. Supervisor Reports

- Director McGee Director McGee introduced Social Work Quality Assurance Specialists staff members Teri Palmer and Wayde Lovingood and explained the role of social work CQI/QA and reported that the Continuous Quality Improvement process is now in place.
- Director McGee explained that CQI staff review social work records using a specially designed tool to capture all of the state audit requirements. The CQI teams reviews case activities, documentation and required forms against policy requirements to ensure all required components are present and meet standards. She described this as detailed and demanding work. She also noted that the agency does not have the same ability as some counties or private agencies to offer bonuses.
- Director McGee stated her goal is to continue building a strong workforce while maintaining quality standards.
- Commissioner Ledford commented that constant scrutiny is challenging. She asked, from a regional perspective, where employees receive training and whether direct appeals have been made to DHHS. Director McGee responded that training locations are between 3–10 hours away, and that requests for closer and more frequent training have been made to the leadership of DHHS.
- Commissioner Ledford asked whether commissioners had made an appeal and recommended inviting DHHS onsite to better understand local challenges. Director McGee stated that a regional representative visits monthly to review data and “Dear Director” letters. She also noted that directors statewide have submitted letters regarding training concerns and non-functional systems. She added that there has been an ongoing effort through statewide director groups to address these issues.
- Commissioner Ledford stated that perspective matters and suggested the county may have an advantage in understanding that certain issues originate at the state level. She noted that it is easy (for the state) to assign blame but more important to offer solutions. She further stated that if the state is doing the monitoring, there should also be more work toward solutions.

B. DHHS MOU Data March 2026

- Data was provided and reviewed with all board members. Staff performance continues to meet all established benchmarks at a high level.
- IMS Plemmons reported that the FNS unit is performing at 100% in Energy, Work First, and Nutrition Services, and 97% for expedited applications. She noted that not all errors are attributable to worker error, as some are due to clients submitting required documentation late. She also noted that 95% is the established passing standard, and the unit is performing above that threshold.
- IMS Michele stated that Medicaid is not included in the MOU reports, as it receives separate performance “report cards.” She reported that both Adult Medicaid and Family and Children’s Medicaid are currently at 100%.
- Dr. Yost asked, in preparation for October 2026 when HR1 goes into effect, what eligibility staff are anticipating. IMS Lance responded that some clients currently receiving Expansion Medicaid may lose eligibility and will likely apply for disability Medicaid, which may increase the volume of disability applications, like patterns seen prior to expansion.
- MS Chastain stated that clients who are self-employed and provide tax returns can verify ongoing work activity. She further noted that these changes are expected to increase workload for eligibility caseworkers, as clients will be required to complete recertifications twice yearly instead of once. She also noted that the state will allow up to 18 exemptions, such as physician documentation, which may further increase case processing requirements for eligibility staff.
- Director McGee reported that she has spoken with county management regarding anticipated additional work requirements and noted that FNS reimbursement is expected to be reduced by approximately 25%. She stated there was initial concern that Commissioners might consider staffing reductions.
- Director McGee explained that DSS had considered hiring additional contracted hourly paid employees to serve as a QA function for eligibility but revised the plan to increase the QA capacity with level II and III IMC staff. This plan would require moving IMC II staff to IMC III to take on 25-40% QA. She further reported that the County has agreed to hire three new Income Maintenance Caseworkers for each unit. Three new requested IMC II positions will take up the extra caseloads (if approved). Director McGee stated that the County Manager is recommending this in his budget presentation.
- Dr. Yost stated that she is impressed with the agency’s proactive planning in April to prepare for anticipated changes expected in October.

C. DSS Service Report

- The service report was reviewed, with no significant changes or unusual trends noted compared to the previous year.
- Dr. Yost requested an update regarding the termination of the In-Home program and the resulting impact. Adult Services Supervisor Daunita Maennle provided the update that the program was transitioned back to the Area on Aging and that the funds would go to the Senior center to administer the “consumer directed.”
- APS Supervisor Maennle stated that several clients were vocal in their dissatisfaction with the change; however, they ultimately understood the circumstances.
- Director McGee explained to Commissioner Ledford that the In-Home Program was previously staffed by a Community Social Services Technician (CSST) who assisted aging and vulnerable clients in remaining safely in their homes for as long as possible. Director McGee further noted that DSS was unable to maintain the CSST position due to it being one of the lowest-paid positions in the county structure, contributing to difficulty in recruitment and retention.
- Mr. Jallah asked whether any priority had been given to DSS clients, as requested, in coordination with the Senior Center to maintain services for these individuals. Director McGee and Supervisor Maennle explained that these services were not ultimately provided to DSS clients. They Members expressed concern regarding vulnerable elderly individuals, noting that some clients receiving these services are known to be at risk of exploitation.
- Chairman Phillips noted that the report reflects 14 foster homes in March 2025, compared to 10 currently. QAS Palmer stated that no foster homes were lost for negative reasons; rather, some transitioned into adoptive homes.
- Dr. Yost commented on the increase in adoptions and asked whether Adoption Promotion funds have ever been used for public events to promote foster care and adoption awareness. She suggested that such events could be held twice per year and inquired about using proceeds to support these efforts. Director McGee stated that a catered event has been discussed in the past and that DSS could plan future events. Dr. Yost offered to chair or co-chair such events.
- Director McGee stated that Commissioner Ledford had previously requested that the Board meeting schedule be adjusted to better align with her commissioner’s schedule so she may attend DSS meetings more regularly. Director McGee indicated this request would be discussed at the next Board meeting.

D. Staff/Unit Accomplishments

- Director McGee stated that she will send staff kudos to the Board via email. She noted that this will include recognition of Social Worker Jeremy Lance for assisting with care coordination and support for an older adult client.

VIII. New Business

A. DSS Strategic Planning

- Director McGee briefly updated the Board on the strategic planning guide enclosed with the meeting material. The full discussion of the DSS Strategic Planning process will occur during the May meeting.
- Board Member Mr. Jallah requested that strategic planning materials be distributed prior to the next meeting for review.

IX. Adjourn

- **Motion to Adjourn:** Mr. James Jallah made a motion to adjourn. Dr. Catherine Yost seconded. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 6:21 PM.

Current Fiscal Turnover Rate: July 2025 – March 2026

July 2025

Average Number of Employees – 71

Separations – 1

August 2025

Average Number of Employees – 70

Separations – 4

September 2025

Average Number of Employees – 67.5

Separations – 0

First Quarter July 2025 – September 2025:

Total Average Number of Employee July 2025 – September 2025 = 69.5

Total Number of Separations July 2025 – September 2025 = 5

Total Turnover Rate: 7.2%

October 2025

Average Number of Employees – 67.5

Separations – 3

November 2025

Average Number of Employees – 67.7

Separations – 1

December 2025

Average Number of Employees – 70

Separations – 0

Second Quarter October 2025 – December 2025:

Total Average Number of Employee October 2025 – December 2025 = 68.4

Total Number of Separations October 2025 – December 2025 = 4

Total Turnover Rate: 5.8%

January 2026

Average Number of Employees – 70

Separations – 6

February 2026

Average Number of Employees – 68.5

Separations – 5

March 2026

Average Number of Employees – 68

Separations – 2

Third Quarter January 2026 – March 2026:

Total Average Number of Employee January 2026 – March 2026 = 68.8

Total Number of Separations January 2026 – March 2026 = 13

Total Turnover Rate: 18.9%

Current Fiscal Year July 2025 – March 2026

Total Average Number of Employee July 2025 – March 2026 = 68.9

Total Number of Separations July 2025 – March 2026 = 22

Total Turnover Rate: 31.9%

Staff Turnover Summary

Cherokee County DSS

Third Quarter Turnover Rate (January 1, 2026 – March 31, 2026)

- Average number of employees during this period: 68.8
- Total separations: 13
- Turnover Rate: 18.9%

Separations Related to Higher Pay Opportunities

The following Social Worker positions separated between October 2025 and March 2026, primarily due to employees accepting positions with higher pay.

Date	Position	Program Area	Separation Type	Reason
3/26/2026	Social Worker III	Permanency Planning	Terminated	Could not complete 8-week SW Pre-Service
3/20/2026	Social Worker III	Permanency Planning	Resigned	Higher pay – Healthy Blue
2/10/2026	Social Work Supervisor III	Child Protective Services	Terminated	Higher pay – Healthy Blue
2/6/2026	Social Worker III	Permanency Planning	Resigned	Higher pay – Healthy Blue
1/30/2026	Social Worker II / Acting SW III	Adult Protective Services	Resigned	Higher pay in Georgia
1/7/2026	Social Worker III	Permanency Planning	Resigned	Higher pay and improved schedule in Georgia
1/5/2026	Social Worker II / SW III	After Hours	Resigned	Higher pay – Healthy Blue

Date	Position	Program Area	Separation Type	Reason
10/3/2025	Social Work Supervisor III	Permanency Planning	Resigned	Higher pay – Healthy Blue

Summary:

Recent turnover has largely been attributed to employees accepting higher-paying opportunities, particularly with managed care organizations and positions in neighboring states.

Focus on child welfare, and on any related investments, is first and foremost for our kids' wellbeing

Information on children involved in U.S. child welfare system

7x Foster youth in U.S. are seven times more likely than non-foster youth to face depression

2x U.S. foster kids are twice as likely as Veterans to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

<10% Former foster youth in U.S. attain a Bachelor's degree at a rate of 2-9%

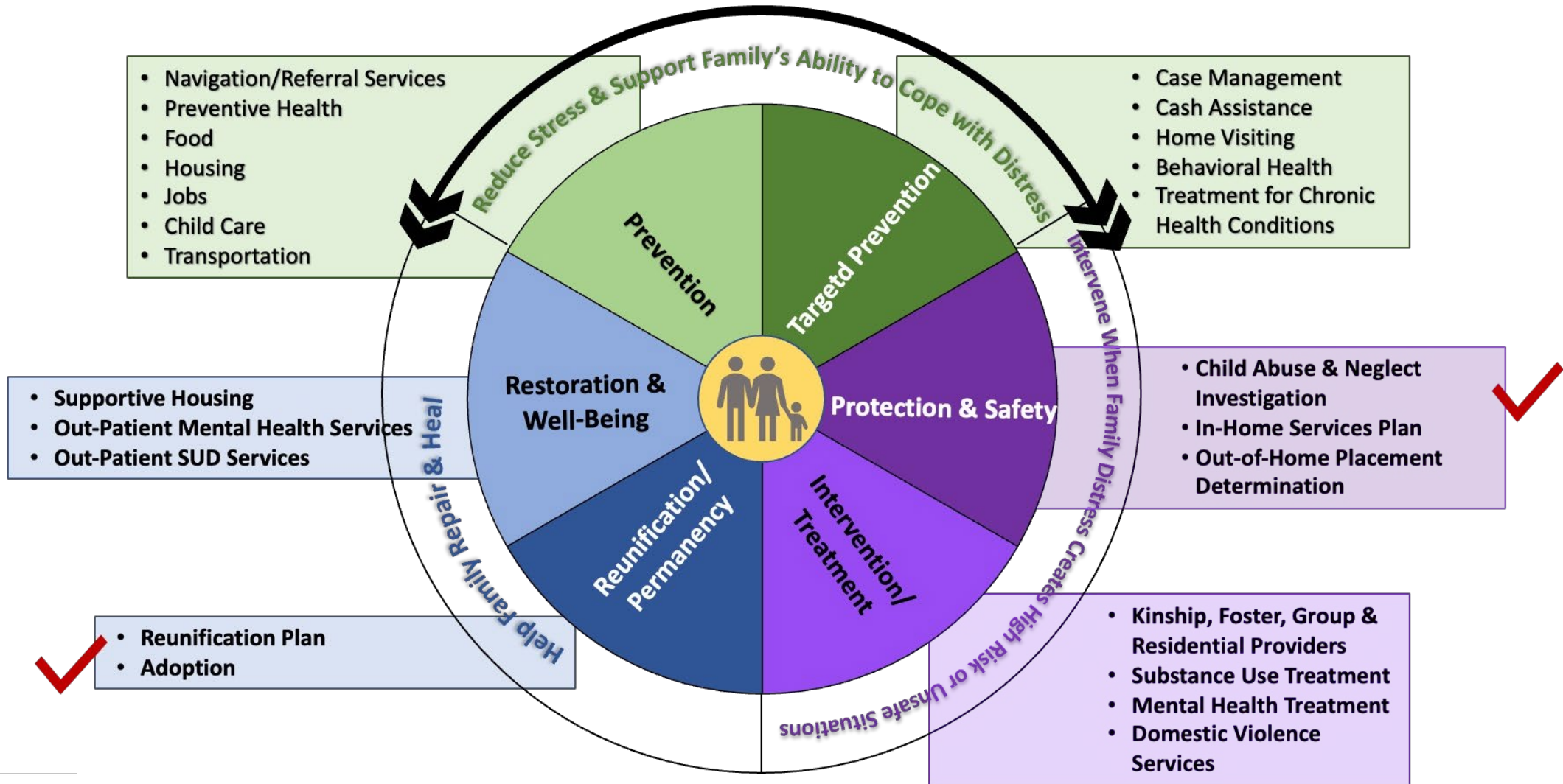
1 in 4 Within four years of aging out, U.S. youth in foster care become homeless at a rate of one in four

~70% Roughly 7 in 10 kids engaged in the child welfare system in the U.S. experienced three or more Adverse Childhood Events, associated with poorer physical & mental health, substance use, and risky behaviors

Source: Turney and Wildeman "Mental and Physical Health of Children in Foster Care", Harvard Medical School-U Michigan-Casey Family "Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study",
1 National Foster Youth Institute, National Working Group on Foster Care/Education, CDC-Kaiser ACE study, "Prevalence and relationship between adverse childhood experiences and child behavior among young children".

CWFW TRANSFORMATION FRAMEWORK

Transforming Child Welfare to Child & Family Well-Being: A Multi-Sector Responsibility

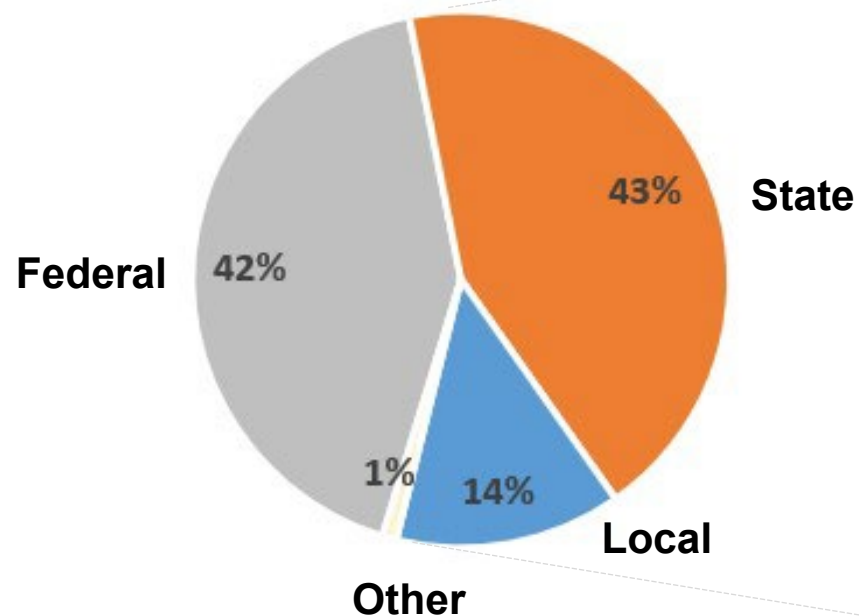


✓ Child welfare and court system mandated involvement

Overall, child welfare funding originates from a mix of federal, state, and local sources, each governed by its own eligibility and allowable uses

Nationally, over half of child welfare funds (~57%) originate from state/local funds

\$32b spent across US in SFY2018



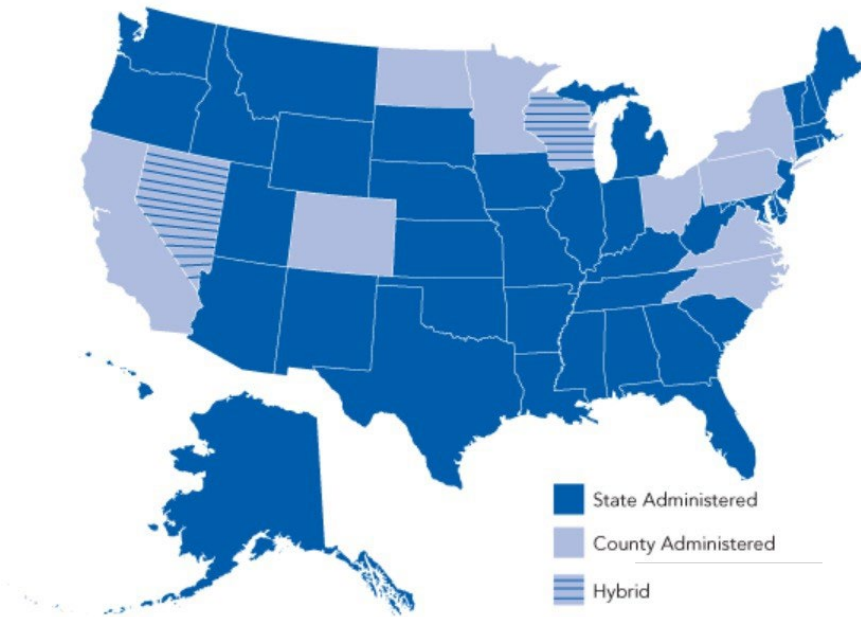
State/local funds are required for many reasons (examples, not exhaustive)

- A. Meeting **service level demands** based on federal and state statutes, beyond federal funding available (e.g., mandated caseload sizes)
- B. Supporting **children excluded from Federal eligibility** (ex. under Title IV-E) – ~37% foster children in North Carolina excluded Title IV-E – due to:
 - Location outside of a foster home
 - Financial status
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - Immigration status (e.g., undocumented)
 - Additional eligibility criteria
- C. Contributing **funding match to Federal funds** (e.g., paying remaining portion to get Title IV-E federal funds)

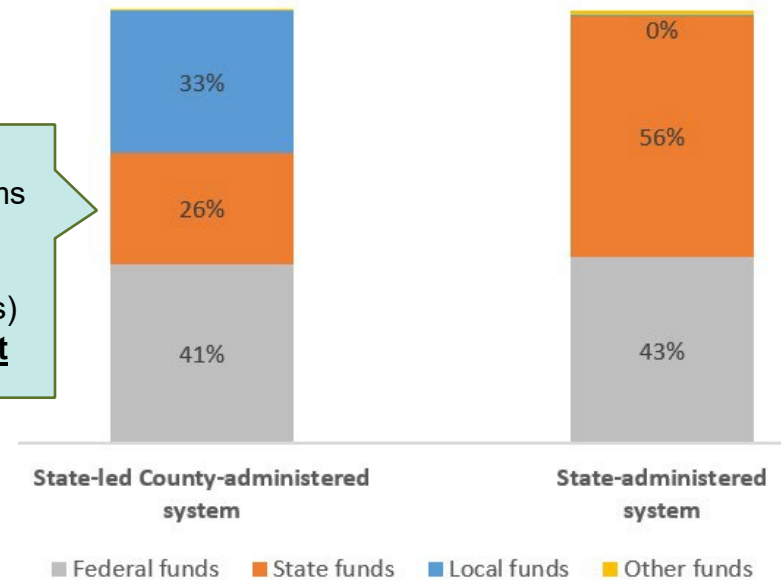
Much of the child welfare comparisons differ by type of system: state-led county-administered vs. state-administered

Nine states have state-led county-administered systems

County-administered systems have different setup and financing from state-administered systems



State-led county-administered systems have a **smaller proportion** (and typically lower levels) **of state investment**



North Carolina is compared to peer state-county-administered systems given the differences in system and in financing, Including using far less in funds and far more in than state-administered systems

Sources: Child Trends "Child Welfare Financing Survey SFY2018"

Across the US, state/local funds most of child welfare, followed by Title E

Sources of child welfare funding in SFY 2016



Note: Each state reported data based on its SFY 2016, which for most states is July 1, 2015, to June 30, 2016. Of the 50 participating states, only six (AL, DC, MI, NY, TX, and WY) reported a different SFY calendar.

led
setup
state
local

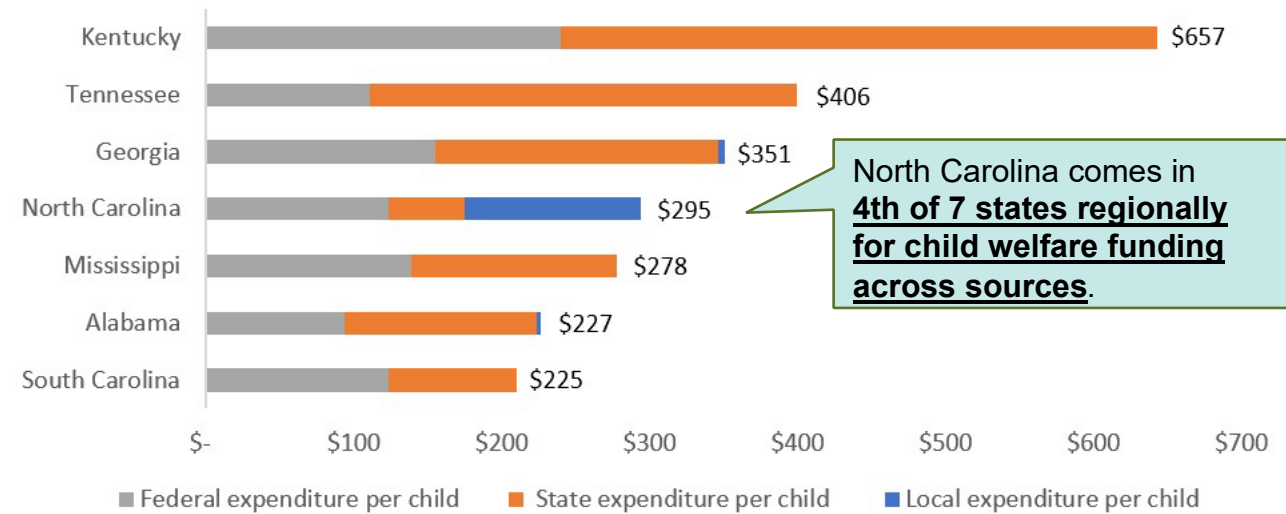
Source: Child Trends "Child Welfare Finance 101 Infographic"

Regionally, North Carolina has the lowest state-funded investment per child (7th of 7) and places 4th of 7 for child welfare funding across public sources

Child welfare funding per child¹ (state expenditure) regionally



Child welfare funding per child¹ (federal, state, local) regionally



Note: Category for Medicaid funds for child welfare is not included

1. Per child in state; Sources: Child Trends "Child Welfare Financing Survey SFY2018"

North Carolina underinvests in Child Welfare, with NC children receiving roughly half as much as children in peer states across public funding sources

Annual per child¹ investment in child welfare across peers (states with state-led county-administered child welfare systems)

¹ Per child in state; Sources: Child Trends “Child Welfare Financing Survey SFY2018”

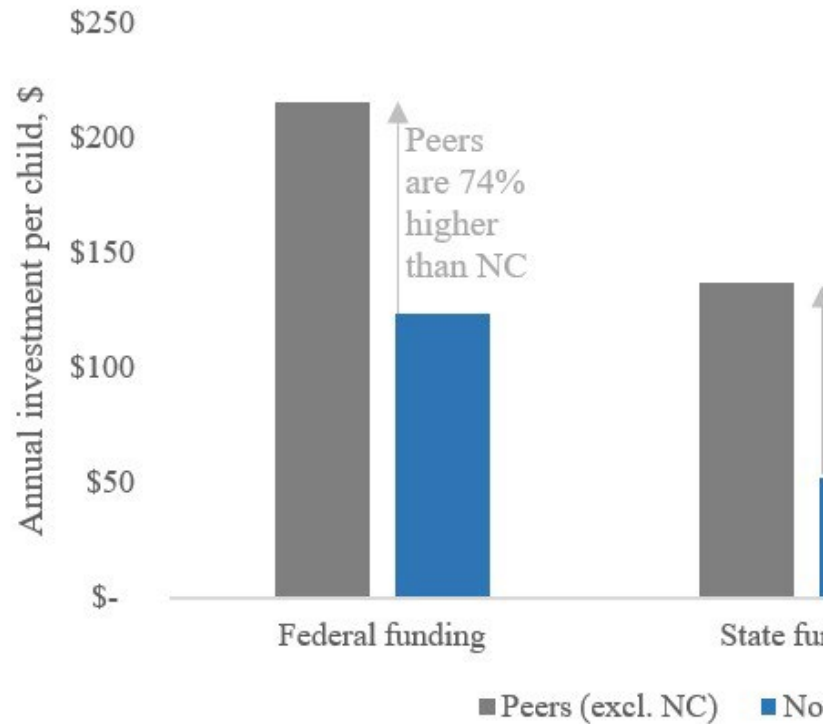


North Carolina **rank** last (9th of 9) among peers in child welfare investment per child across public sources (federal, state, local)

Note: Category for Medicaid funds for child welfare is not included

North Carolina shows biggest relative shortfall versus peers originating at the state-level, with peers investing 2.6x more per child

North Carolina child welfare funding per child¹ by source versus peers (states with state-led county-administered child welfare systems)



North Carolina comes in **lower for each funding source**. The **biggest relative discrepancy is in state funds**.

Federal funding also shows a difference, which **relates to underinvestment on the state side constricting federal dollars** (for example, if NC invested in a social worker to improve timeliness where caseload guidelines exceeded, it could draw additional federal dollars to finance a portion of the role).

Note: Category for Medicaid funds for child welfare is not included

1. Per child in state; Sources: Child Trends "Child Welfare Financing Survey SFY2018"

Research shown overall that investments in children and low-income families are linked to positive outcomes and returns on investment

State spending is inversely associated with maltreatment outcomes

For each additional \$1000 that states spent on benefit programs per individual with low-income, there was:

- **-4.3%** difference in maltreatment reporting (including significant differences for neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse)
- **-4.0%** difference in substantiated maltreatment reports
- **-2.1%** difference in foster care placements
- **-7.7%** difference in fatalities

Child welfare can be costly to public systems, but overall investments in child health & education produce high returns

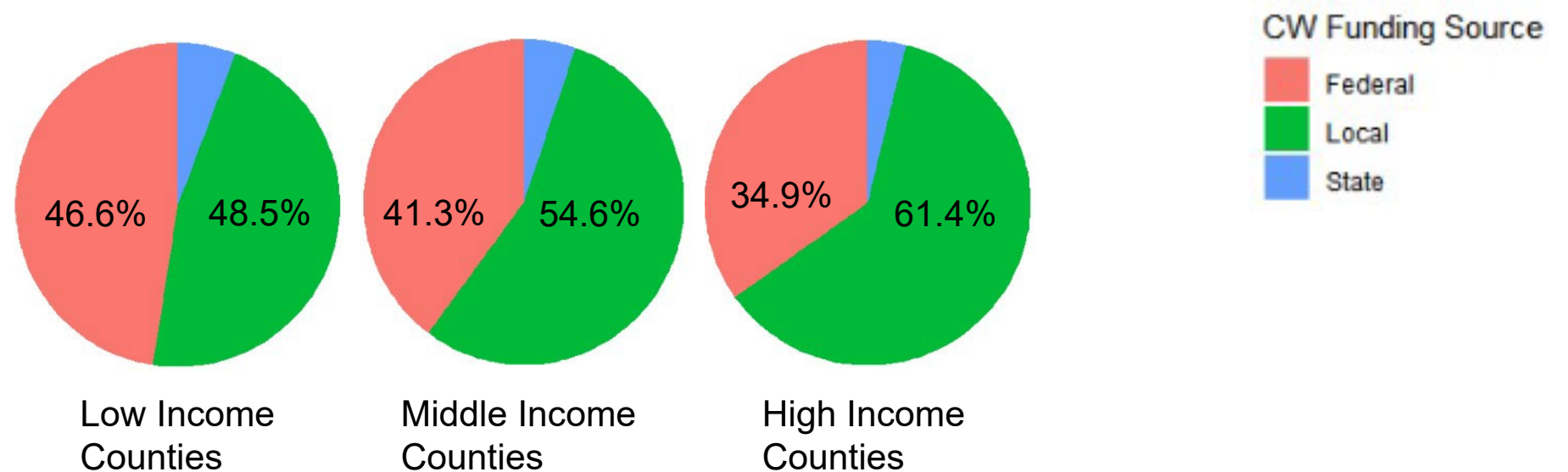
Source: "State spending on public benefit programs and child maltreatment", CDC National Center for Injury Prevention & Control

- **For each child maltreatment victim, the economic impact to public systems is ~\$200k** including but not limited to health, special education, criminal justice costs (~\$210k per surviving victim per CDC in 2010 dollars). Subsequent studies calculate it **as high as \$830k per victim** (per CDC in 2015 dollars).
- **Studies across ~70 government policy programs demonstrate that investments in child health & child education yield the highest returns**
- Direct investments in health & education of low-income children produce the highest values
- Many direct investments in low-income children's health and education have initial expenditures offset over time

and RTI, Opportunity Insights Harvard University “Unified Welfare Analysis of Government Policies”.

NC counties vary in their share of local administrative funds for child welfare

North Carolina child welfare funding for program administration¹ from Form 1571s by income tier



- Counties financed 56% of NC child welfare administrative program funds¹ during SFY20-21.

¹. Administrative funds from form 1571 excl. payments for room & board, adoption, guardianship, etc. Sources: NC DHHS Office of the Controller 1571 submissions

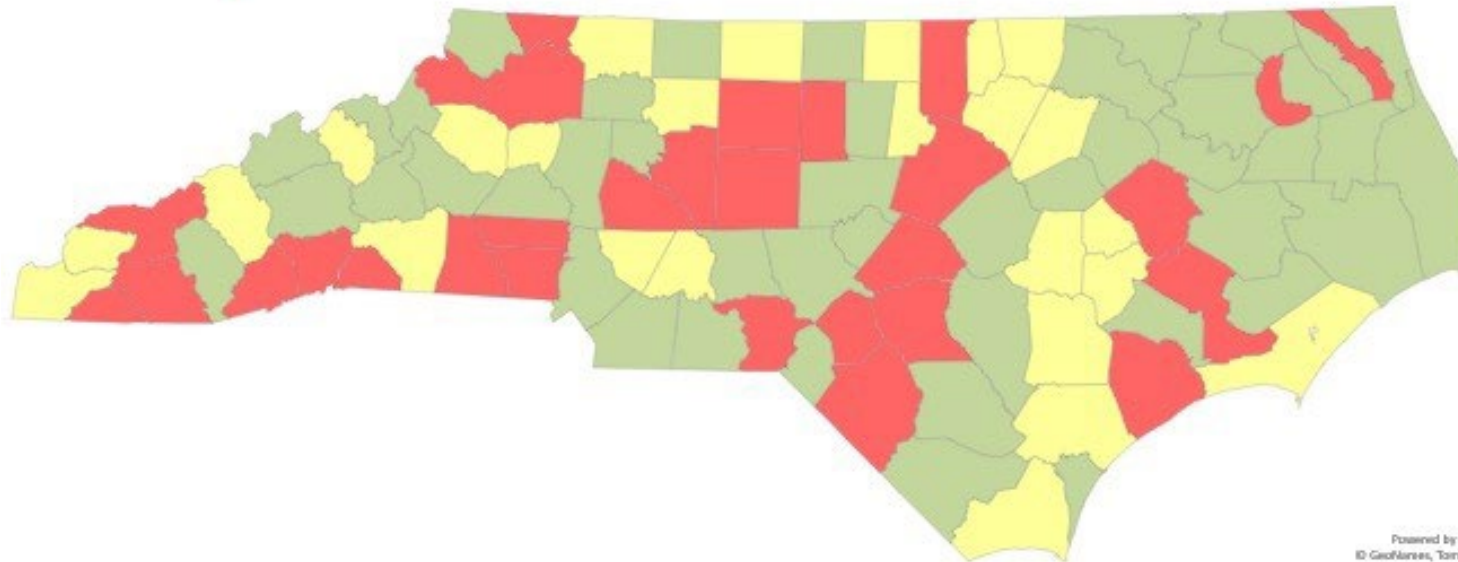
- However, wealthier counties fund larger shares of child welfare budgets locally.
 - As counties outstrip capped state allocations, those with **more resources and stable tax bases** can draw on additional funding to address still-remaining staffing and service needs

Discrepant service levels impact children differently based on where they live across the state

In 2021, half of North Carolina counties did not have enough staff in place to meet caseloads (for CPS assessments)

Ensuring kids have social workers to support required caseloads (CPS assessments)

■ Not enough available nor budgeted ■ Enough budgeted but unavailable ■ Enough available and budgeted



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This analysis looks at social workers supporting Child Protective Services assessments. The recommended caseload is 1 caseworker for every 10 child protective service cases under investigation. Green shows counties with enough budgeted and hired staff to meet required caseload ratio, yellow shows counties with enough budgeted but not enough hired, and red shows those with neither enough budgeted nor hired.

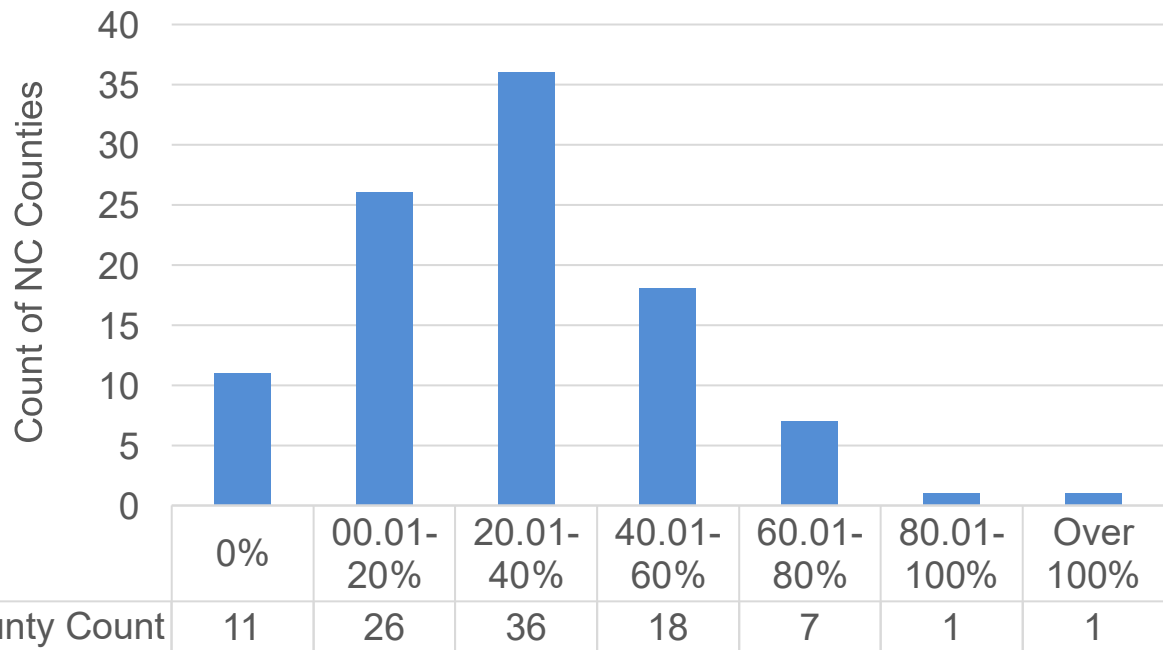
Source: NC "Workforce Data" reported from counties, Dec 2021

Turnover and salary levels contribute to staffing difficulties and downstream implications for NC children served

Turnover Rate for NC County DSS Child Welfare

Social Workers in 2020

Turnover County



Percentage	Count
0%	11
00.01-10%	7
10.01-20%	19
20.01-30%	27
30.01-40%	9
40.01-50%	14
50.01-60%	4
60.01-70%	5
70.01-80%	2
80.01-90%	1
90.01-100%	0
<u>+100.01%</u>	<u>1</u>

Turnover: Timely service & continuity are impacted by turnover. NC counties experienced **~30% turnover on average** in 2020. **~1 in 4 counties experienced at least 40 percent of its workers departing**, the majority of which are rural or low-wealth.

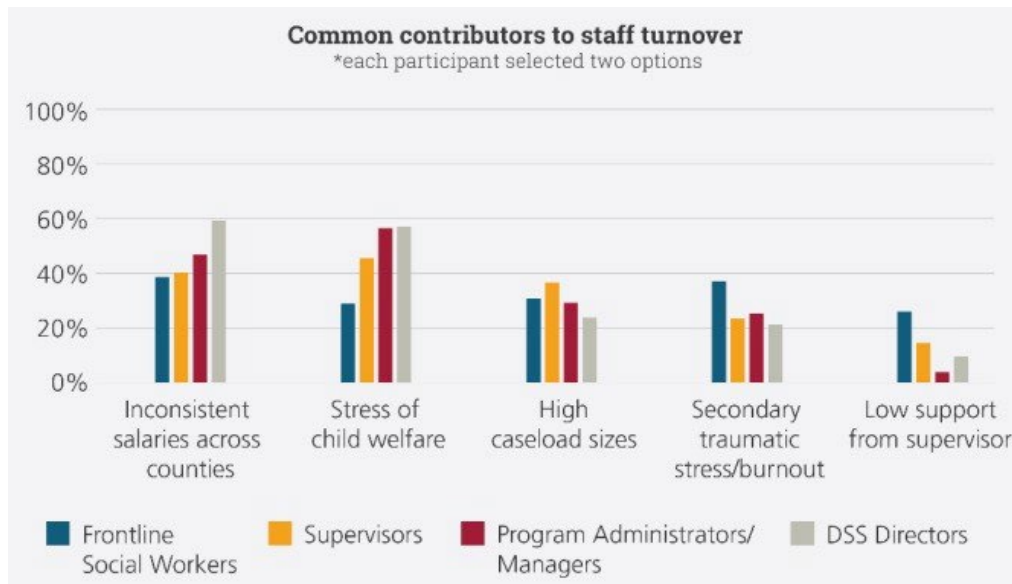
Pay: The most cited contributor to turnover was inconsistent salaries –

CPS assessment social workers could make up to 57% elsewhere in NC.

Source: NCDHHS Child Welfare Staffing, North Carolina Statewide Child Protective Services Evaluation

Many studies on child welfare staffing and turnover detail key contributing factors including inconsistent or low salaries, as does research in North Carolina

Contributors to turnover in Child Welfare in NC



Protective factors per literature

- Fair salary and benefits
- Supervisory and co-worker support
- Opportunities for achievement / advancement
- Strong leadership communication • Autonomy

Risk factors per literature

- Emotional exhaustion

Source: North Carolina Statewide Child Protective Services Evaluation, Retention of front-line staff in child welfare, Burnout in Child Welfare: The Role of Employment Characteristics and Workplace Opportunities, Respect in the workplace: a mixed methods study of retention and turnover in the voluntary child welfare sector

Staffing consequences like high caseloads, low pay, and high turnover can have deleterious impacts for children

Studies demonstrate negative effects of staff shortages and turnover

Effect of turnover: within a year, percent of children obtaining a permanent home based on number of different caseworkers (Wisconsin)

- Lower permanency rates
- Longer foster care stays
 - Lower likelihood of timely reunification
 - Lack of stability for the child
 - Loss of trust between youth and caseworkers
 - Delayed timeliness of investigations
- Failure to meet federal performance standards



1 case worker throughout



74.5% with permanent home

2 different case workers



17.5% with permanent home

3+ different case workers



<= 5% with permanent home

If a child's case worker leaves, the child's likelihood of reaching permanency in that period on average drops from ~75% to under 20%

Source: Review of Turnover in Milwaukee County Private Agency Child Welfare Ongoing Case Management Staff, Investigating the effects of caseworker characteristics in child welfare, The unsolved challenge of system reform, Listening to the voices of children in foster care: youth speak out about child welfare workforce turnover and selection, Child Welfare: HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff.

NC'S CHILD & FAMILY WELLBEING TRANSFORMATION PILLARS



Intervene When Family Distress Creates High-Risk or Unsafe Situations



Help Family Repair and Heal



Robust Array of
Statewide



Prevention,
Intervention
& Treatment
Services

2027 TARGETS:

- Invest \$XXX to increase the array of prevention,



Expand XXX
intervention to
serve all 100
counties High-
Quality
Out-of-Home Placement
Options

treatment and
intervention
services available
statewide

2027 TARGETS:

- Increase the number of kinship and foster home beds by XX# or %
- Increase the number of available residential beds (SPECIFY TYPE?) by XX# or % Strong Child Protection & Safety Network

2027 TARGETS:

- Increase state investment in the state and county child protection and safety workforce by \$XX or %
- All 100 counties will have 1 caseworker for every 10 child protective service cases under investigation.

Energy Programs – Measured Monthly

1. The county will process 95% of Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) applications, with no heat or cooling source, or applications with a health-related crisis with a disconnect, final, or past due notice within one (1) business day from the date of application or date all verification is received, whichever comes first.

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	100.00%	October	100.00%	January	100.00%	April			#DIV/0!
August	100.00%	November	100.00%	February	100.00%	May			
September	100.00%	December	100.00%	March	100.00%	June			
QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	QTR Average	#DIV/0!

2. The county will process 95% of Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) applications, that have heat or cooling source with a past due or final notice, within two (2) business days from the date of application or date all verification is received, whichever comes first

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	100.00%	October	100.00%	January	100.00%	April			#DIV/0!
August	100.00%	November	100.00%	February	100.00%	May			
September	100.00%	December	100.00%	March	100.00%	June			
QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	QTR Average	#DIV/0!

Work First

1. The county will process 95% of Work First applications within 45 days of receipt.

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	100.00%	October	100.00%	January	100.00%	April			#DIV/0!
August	100.00%	November	100.00%	February	100.00%	May			
September	100.00%	December	100.00%	March	100.00%	June			
QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	QTR Average	#DIV/0!

NOTE: The quarterly average will be inaccurate if the data from all three months within that quarter are not recorded .

Food and Nutrition

1. The county will process 95% of expedited FNS applications within the timeframe that allows the household to have access to the FNS benefits on or before the 7th calendar day from the date of application.

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	100.00%	October	97.14%	January	100.00%	April			
August	98.00%	November	100.00%	February	97.50%	May			
September	100.00%	December	100.00%	March	97.50%	June			
QTR Average	99.33%	QTR Average	99.05%	QTR Average	98.33%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!		#DIV/0!

2. The county will process 95% of regular FNS applications within the timeframe that allows the household to have access to the FNS benefits on or before the 30th calendar day from the date of application.

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	100.00%	October	100.00%	January	98.51%	April			
August	100.00%	November	100.00%	February	100.00%	May			
September	98.78%	December	100.00%	March	100.00%	June			
QTR Average	99.59%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	99.50%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!		#DIV/0!

3. The county will ensure that 95% of FNS recertifications are processed on time, each month

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	99.50%	October	100.00%	January	100.00%	April			
August	99.43%	November	100.00%	February	100.00%	May			
September	100.00%	December	100.00%	March	100.00%	June			
QTR Average	99.64%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!		#DIV/0!

NOTE: The quarterly average will be inaccurate if the data from all three months within that quarter are not recorded .

Child Welfare

1. The county will ensure that 95% of all foster youth have a face-to-face visit with the social worker each month.

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4			
July	100.00%	October	100.00%	January	100.00%	April			
August	100.00%	November	100.00%	February	100.00%	May			
September	100.00%	December	100.00%	March	100.00%	June			
QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	100.00%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	Annual Average	#DIV/0!

*July and August low percentages are due to two youth on runaway status

NOTE: The quarterly average will be inaccurate if the data from all three months within that quarter are not recorded .

Adult Protective Services

1. The county will complete 85% of APS evaluations involving allegations of abuse or neglect within 30 days of the report

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4			
July	5@100%	October	14@100%	January	7@100%	April			
August	10@100%	November	9 @ 88.88%	February	11@100%	May			
September	10@100%	December	5@100%	March	8@100%	June			
QTR Average	#DIV/0!	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	Annual Average	#DIV/0!

2. The county will complete 85% of APS evaluations involving allegations of exploitation within 45 days of the report.

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4			
July	4@100%	October	0 reports in timeframe	January	3@100%	April			
August	3@100%	November	5@100%	February	0@100%	May			
September	1@100%	December	1@100%	March	5@100%	June			
QTR Average	#DIV/0!	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	Annual Average	#DIV/0!

NOTE: The quarterly average will be inaccurate if the data from all three months within that quarter are not recorded .

Adult Protective Services - Special Assistance for the Aged and Disabled

1. Special Assistance for the Aged Applications

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4			
July	100.00%	October	100.00%	January	100.00%	April			
August	100.00%	November	100.00%	February	100.00%	May			
September	0.00%	December	100.00%	March	100.00%	June			
QTR Average	67%	QTR Average	100%	QTR Average	100%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	Annual Average	#DIV/0!

2. Special Assistance for the Disabled

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4			
July	100.00%	October	100.00%	January	100.00%	April			
August	100.00%	November	100.00%	February	100.00%	May			
September	0.00%	December	100.00%	March	100.00%	June			
QTR Average	67%	QTR Average	100%	QTR Average	100%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	Annual Average	#DIV/0!

NOTE: The quarterly average will be inaccurate if the data from all three months within that quarter are not recorded .

Child Support Services

1. Percentage of paternities established or acknowledged for children born out of wedlock. The county paternity establishment performance level must exceed 50% at the end of the State Fiscal Year (June 30).

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	91.23%	October	97.37%	January	100.88%	April			
August	93.57%	November	98.83%	February	101.46%	May			
September	95.03%	December	98.54%	March	103.22%	June			
QTR Average	93.28%	QTR Average	98.25%	QTR Average	101.85%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	Annual Average	#DIV/0!

2. Percentage of child support cases that have a court order establishing support obligations. The county support order establishment performance level must exceed 50% at the end of the State Fiscal Year (June 30).

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	93.20%	October	93.55%	January	92.91%	April			
August	92.61%	November	95.03%	February	92.25%	May			
September	92.27%	December	94.77%	March	92.93%	June			
QTR Average	92.69%	QTR Average	94.45%	QTR Average	92.70%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	Annual Average	#DIV/0!

3. Percentage of current child support paid. The county current collections performance level must exceed 40% at the end of the State Fiscal Year (June 30).

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	69.15%	October	66.29%	January	65.42%	April			
August	66.21%	November	65.66%	February	65.29%	May			
September	66.02%	December	65.39%	March	65.38%	June			
QTR Average	67.13%	QTR Average	65.78%	QTR Average	65.36%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	Annual Average	#DIV/0!

4. Percentage of cases received a payment toward arrears. The county arrearage collections performance level must exceed 40% at the end of the State Fiscal Year (June 30).

Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Annual Average	
July	34.04%	October	53.33%	January	58.89%	April			
August	42.22%	November	53.85%	February	60.87%	May			
September	48.18%	December	57.21%	March	61.61%	June			
QTR Average	41.48%	QTR Average	54.80%	QTR Average	60.46%	QTR Average	#DIV/0!	Annual Average	#DIV/0!

NOTE: The quarterly average will be inaccurate if the data from all three months within that quarter are not recorded .

Board Report

Service Month:
March 2026

Budget

	Mar-26	% of Budget	Mar-25	% of Budget
Total Revenues (YTD)	\$2,776,830.64	64.5%	\$2,870,768.45	60.9%
Total Expenses (YTD)	\$7,924,657.24	72.8%	\$7,641,379.71	66.0%
Expenses without settlement	\$4,996,085.81	58.0%	\$4,712,808.28	52.7%

Services

Child Welfare	Calendar Year			
	Mar-26	Current -YTD	Mar-25	Current -YTD
# of Child Abuse Reports Received	35	106	31	104
# of Screened In Reports	18	60	13	49
# of Screened out Reports	17	46	18	55
# of Other County Assists	2		2	
# of Open Assessments on last day of month	15		19	
# of Open In-Home (Case Mgmt.) Services Cases	3		1	
# of Children Entered Into Legal Custody	0	3	2	15
# of Children Left Custody	0	9	1	24
# of Children In Legal Custody	30		27	
# of Children Placed With Relatives	6		4	
# of Children Placed in Foster Homes/Other Placements	24		23	
# of Foster Care 18-21	3		4	
# of Licensed Foster Homes	10		14	
# of Agency Adoptions Completed	0	23	1	15
# of Non-Agency Adoptions Completed	0	6	0	3
# of Infants Affected by Substance Abuse	0	3	0	10
# of Child Family Team Meetings	19		18	

Adult Services	Mar-26	Current CY-YTD	Mar-25	Current CY-YTD
# of Adult Protective Services Reports	18	61	18	51
# of APS Reports Accepted for Evaluation	10	37	12	31
# of Representative Payees	17		21	
# of Current Guardianship Cases	21		22	
# of Adult Care Homes	3		3	
# of Medicaid Transportation Clients	106		118	
# of Transit, L&N and Client reimbursed Trips	81	324	81	365

Child Support Enforcement

Child Support Enforcement	Fiscal Year			
	Mar-26	Current-YTD	Mar-25	Current-YTD
# of Active Cases	568	568	575	575
# of Paternity	2	21	0	11
CS Orders Established	8	71	2	31
# of Modifications Completed	0	11	0	3
# of Enforcement Actions Completed	23	323	53	391
Amount of Collections	\$97,644.02	\$834,861.73	\$86,965.55	\$662,598.67
Arrears	Total Outstanding	\$2,773,557.41	Collected FY-YTD Arrears	\$194,527.80
Inherited Arrears	\$853,672.11			
Outstanding Purge Amounts	\$351,884.05			

Economic Services

Economic Services	Calendar Year		Calendar Year	
	Mar-26	YTD	Mar-25	YTD
# of Medicaid/Special Assistance Appl Taken	239	750	229	775
# of Medicaid/SA Recerts completed	506	1461	476	1403
# of Medicaid Participants	10,483		11,001	
# of Special Assistance Participants	56		54	
# of TANF Participants	10		9	
# of FNS Applications (applications denied)	170 (40)	474 (117)	172 (52)	550 (144)
# of FNS Recerts completed	194	554	233	617
# of FNS Benefits Paid	657,593	1,975,675.00	798,442.00	\$2,406,790.00
# of FNS Households	2122		2467	
Fraud Collections				
# of Day Care Recipients	108		156	
# on Day Care Waiting List	0		0	
Energy Assistance (Heating/Cooling)				
LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program) Appl Taken	27	232	42	175
LIEAP Benefits Paid	6,300.00	64,400.00	10,700.00	29,700.00
CRISIS Applications Taken	30	99	35	114
CRISIS Benefits Paid	8086.70	25,433.37	10,530.07	28,574.12

Personnel**Vacancies/Hires/Terminations for March 2026**

		Vacancies
New Hires	5	(12) as of March 31, 2026
New Hire Orientations Completed		
Interagency Transfers		
Separations	2	
Promotion or Work/Against	2	
Reason for Separation:	() Retirement; () Relocation; (1) Dismissal (1) Resignation	
Length of Service:	(1) Less than 2 yrs.; (1) 2-5 years; () 5-10 years; () over 10 years	

Cherokee County DSS

Strategic Planning Discussion Guide

Purpose

To establish 3–5 strategic priorities that will guide the Department of Social Services over the next 3–5 years and define what success looks like for Cherokee County.

Current Environment

- Increasing workforce challenges and turnover
- Statewide placement instability impacting local operations
- Growing complexity of cases across all programs
- Growing number of APS cases and Guardianship Population
- Increasing and Changing Federal Eligibility Requirements
- Punitive State Oversight / Audits
- Strong performance in key areas, with opportunities to strengthen consistency and outcomes

Strategic Pillars

- Workforce Stability & Excellence
- Recruit and retain qualified staff
- Develop strong supervisors and future leaders
- Reduce turnover and improve continuity of care

Practice Quality & Accountability Across All Units

- Build and fully embed full CQI processes across all units
- Ensure consistent, high-quality casework
- Strengthen supervision and oversight
- Maintain compliance and reduce risk
- Reduce Incidents and Accidents

Eligibility Outcomes

- Maintain Accuracy Benchmarks at 98%
- Maintain Timeliness Benchmarks at 98%
- Maintain PER Under 6%
-

Child & Family Outcomes

- Maintain State Safety Benchmarks
- Achieve timely permanency for children
- Reduce placement moves and disruptions
- Improve long-term outcomes for families

Child Support Outcomes

- Meet incentive goals for each SFY as determined by the State
- Meet all Self-Assessment goals for each SFY as determined by the State
- Maintain 90% or above in monthly Quality Reviews

Adult Services Outcomes

- Complete 85 % of APS reports within 30 days for abuse or neglect
- Complete 85 % of APS reports allegations of exploitation within 45 days
- Provide what the state considers to be “timely protection” for all substantiated reports

Community Partnerships

- Strengthen collaboration with local agencies
- Expand placement and service options
- Build a coordinated system of care
- Improve Court Processes to improve timely permanence

Financial Stewardship

- Maximize use of available funding
- Ensure efficient use of resources
- Reduce reliance on high-cost emergency solutions
- Increase other funding sources such as Medicaid Administrative Claiming (MAC), grant funding, and other non-government sources of funding to support emerging and emergency program needs.

Date	General Location	Type of Incident	Brief Description	Injury Reported	Action Taken	Reported By
7/3/2025	In Agency Vehicle	Ergonomic/Strain Injury	Employee reached across the vehicle to pick up notebooks in the passenger side floor board which caused shoulder pain.	Yes	ER	Employee
7/22/2025	Stairs from 2nd floor to 3rd floor	Slip/Fall	Client fell going up steps landing on her hands and knees	Yes	None	Director
7/29/2025	In the Field	Slip/Fall	Employee fell on concrete steps in the field while attempting a client visit.	Yes	Ambulance to ER	Employee
9/4/2025	In the Field	Ergonomic/Strain Injury	In the field employee strained knee causing muscle pain from knee to foot.	Yes	None	Employee
11/5/2025	Parking lot on 2nd level	Slip/Fall	Employee fell off scooter onto hip and knees.	Yes	None	Employee
1/23/2026	In her office on 3rd floor	Other	Lady bug bit employees left foot	Yes	None	Supervisor
1/25/2026	Clients Home	Other	Client fired a hand gun whie sitting next to employee inside the client's home .	Yes	None	Director
1/28/2026	Clients Home	Other	Dog Bite	Yes	Urgent Care	Employee