CHEROKEE COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
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828-837-7455

Cherokee County N.C. Department of Social Services
Board of Directors - Regular Meeting Minutes
October 27, 2026

I. Call to Order

The DSS Board meeting was called to order by Chairman Phillips at 5:00 P.M.

Members present:
Bo Phillips, Chairman
James Jallah, Member
Cathrine Yost, Member
A quorum was present

Staff Present
Amanda McGee, Director
Joslyn Ellis-Fournier, CPS Supervisor
Cathrine Thorley, Adoptions Supervisor

II. Approval of the Agenda

On the motion of James Jallah, with a second by Dr. Yost, and all voting in favor, the meeting agenda was accepted as presented.

III. Adoption of Minutes

On the motion of Dr. Yost, with a second by James Jallah, and all voting in favor, the August and September DSS Board Minutes were accepted as presented**.**

IV. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

V. Old Business

A. Be The Village Event Wrap Up

Members described the Be the Village event as successful and said coverage in the Scout provided positive publicity for DSS. The board had not yet received the total fundraising amount; the figure was pending from Miriam. Thank-you cards were prepared for contributors, including the restaurant and venue. Members praised the event's vision and its recognition of long-term foster and

adoptive parents. They discussed making it an annual event, potentially with more staff support and an online silent auction. Long-time foster parent Jen Forchetti was praised for her contribution to the event's foster-care and adoption focus. Judge Justin Green provided keynote remarks which were very well received and praised. The venue was well regarded and deemed as a good choice for future events.

B. Farm Bill Update

Members reviewed the NCACDSS Advocacy Committee legislative priorities and talking points, as well as draft letters concerning the Farm Bill and HR 1 impacts. The Association's talking points call for the state to cover the 25% reduction in administrative funding and any benefit-cost share associated with payment-error rates not falling below 6%. The county's estimated annual administrative reduction is $208,000. The potential payment-error-related cost is estimated at nearly $80,000.

The proposed advocacy approach for the NC Congressional delegation asks representatives to advocate for a two-year delay in HR 1 SNAP provisions, while it asks State legislators to advocate for the North Carolina General Assembly to fund the financial impacts caused by HR 1 to counties. On a motion by Dr. Yost, seconded by Mr. Jallah, the Board unanimously approved the proposed legislative advocacy letters and authorized their submission to the Chair of the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners for consideration and signature.

Director McGee informed the Board that she reported to the Cherokee County Board of County Commissioners during their October meeting the impacts of HR 1 statewide and local SNAP impacts, and the county's zero error rate. Food and Nutrition Supervisor Katrina Plemmons attended. The Commissioners fully supported the DSS efforts on HR1 and praised the zero-error rate.

C. Strategic Planning Discussion

Director McGee provided an update on the development of the Cherokee County DSS 2026–2036 Strategic Plan. The community survey received responses from approximately 10% of invited participants as of the meeting date. The staff SWOT survey was launched October 27, 2026. Survey findings will inform the strategic planning process, with focus groups tentatively planned for January 2027.

Board members discussed the value of obtaining additional feedback directly from DSS customers through a brief, confidential survey. Suggested methods included paper surveys, a secure collection box, and straightforward rating questions.

Members also discussed opportunities to strengthen public understanding of DSS services and improve community confidence. Suggestions included increased public communication, educational videos, improved website content, and greater visibility of agency accomplishments.

Director McGee indicated that DSS would incorporate these recommendations into its ongoing communications and strategic planning efforts.

VI. New Business

A. DSS Board Candidate

Renee DeWeese, invited to the Be the Village event by Dr. Yost, volunteered for a DSS board position and has applied. Her nomination is scheduled for a county commissioners' meeting on the same evening as the DSS board meeting. To allow members to attend the commissioners' meeting, on the motion of Dr. Yost, with a second by James Jallah, and all voting in favor, the board voted to move its November meeting to the courthouse and change the start time to 4:00 p.m. on the third Tuesday, November 17, 2026. Staff will publish the revised meeting details.

Members discussed the importance of community representation on the DSS Board and the need to identify qualified candidates for existing vacancies. Staff will verify the appointment authority associated with each vacant position.

B. NCACDSS Advocacy Committee Legislative Priorities

Director McGee provided the NCACDSS Legislative Priorities. One of the priorities is to have DHHS move the responsibility of investigating Adult Care homes back to DHHS. Members discussed the county's two adult care homes, both in Andrews: Advanced Living and L&N. DSS explained that the association's legislative priority is to shift adult care home complaint investigations back to the state.

Members discussed concerns regarding the county's responsibility for investigating complaints involving adult care homes, including the potential for conflicting responsibilities when DSS is involved in both arranging placements and investigating complaints. Members also discussed the significant operational demands associated with emergency facility closures, including coordinating relocation and ensuring residents' immediate needs are met.

Staff clarified for Members that adult care homes are assisted-living-type settings, distinct from skilled nursing facilities covered by the regional ombudsman program. The association's position is that the state should assume the investigation responsibility, as it did for childcare-center investigations.

C. Management Reports

Supervisor Reports

Child Protective Services

CPS reported approximately 20 open cases, including two new cases in the previous two days. Two workers are fully experienced; one has about a week remaining in pre-service training.

Child and Family Team Meetings

Board members questioned the decrease in reported Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings from 28 in September 2025 to 13 in September 2026. Supervisor Thorley explained that following the retirement of the CFT Coordinator, supervisors continued conducting required meetings within their units; however, some meetings were not consistently reflected in the statistical report. A CPS social worker has accepted the CFT Coordinator position and will transition into that role.

Adoptions

Supervisor Thorley reported progress for a sibling group of five that had been in care for five years as of September 1. The newer adoption worker was commended for successfully completing her first adoptions from start to finish.

Foster Care

Members asked about kinship placements. Staff explained that policy requires searching for relatives when children enter custody, that the judge approves the placement through the court order, and that some kinship caregivers may work toward licensure. Staff also noted that support payments may be available, often at the board rate, with increases in some cases based on a child's needs.

Adult Protective Services

Adult Protective Services (accepted) reports had increased to 56 year-to-date, compared with 36 at the same point last year. Guardianship caseloads and other reported figures were not significantly different from last year.

Non-emergency Medicaid transportation (NEMT)

Director McGee reported increasing demand for Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT), with county transit capacity and scheduling limitations affecting access to medical appointments, particularly out-of-county specialty care. DSS has entered into a transportation agreement with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to supplement available transportation resources. When traditional transportation providers are unavailable, DSS continues to coordinate alternative transportation arrangements. Leadership will monitor transportation demand and capacity to determine whether additional resources are necessary.

D. DHHS MOU Data – Deferred to Next Meeting

E. Quality Assurance Updates – Deferred to Next Meeting

F. Statistical Report

Members asked about fraud collections and SNAP household counts. Staff explained that the reported 2,018 refers to households, not individuals, and that Medicaid and Food and Nutrition fraud collections were combined in the Fraud report. Members said individual counts would better convey program impact in public communications and legislative letters. Staff will explore how to obtain or calculate the number of people served. The presentation had cited approximately $7.5 million in annual SNAP benefits.

Members discussed childcare access. Although there is no formal waiting list under the current arrangement, staff confirmed a serious shortage of available childcare slots. The number of slots was not available during the meeting and will need to be retrieved. CPS and foster-care referrals are supposed to receive priority, but this does not always resolve availability. Staff noted that families receiving childcare assistance through CPS may lose coverage or become responsible for payment when their case closes, even if they remain in school or otherwise need care.

G. Staff/Unit Accomplishments – Deferred

H. Board Items

Child Fatality Team Meeting
Members discussed scheduling a November Child Fatality Prevention Team meeting to meet the annual meeting requirements. The meeting is tentatively planned for the third Tuesday of November via Microsoft Teams. Potential agenda items include updated pediatric guidance and interagency case discussion.

I. Adjourn

On the motion of James Jallah, with a second by Dr. Yost and all voting in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 6:15 PM.

CCDSS Board Report

SERVICE MONTH: October 2026

Budget — Fiscal Year

	Oct-26	% of Budget	Oct-25	% of Budget
Total Revenues (YTD)	$1,430,525.35	37.2%	$1,268,142.77	29.4%
Total Expenses (YTD)	$5,364,000.23	49.3%	$5,034,537.75	48.8%
Expenses without settlement	$2,435,428.80	28.1%	$2,105,966.32	24.4%

Services — Fiscal Year

Child Welfare	Oct-26	FY-YTD	Oct-25	FY-YTD
# of Child Abuse Reports Received	35	178	56	168
# of Screened In Reports	20	109	30	86
# of Screened out Reports	15	69	26	82
# of Other County Assists	9		4	
# of Open Assessments on last day of month	23		31	
# of Open In-Home (Case Mgmt.) Services Cases	3		1	
# of Children Entered Into Legal Custody	3	8	3	7
# of Children Left Custody	0	1	4	6
# of Children In Legal Custody	38		30	
# of Children Placed With Relatives	14		5	
# of Children Placed in Foster Homes/Other Placements	24		22	
# of Foster Care 18-21	4		2	
# of Licensed Foster Homes	10		10	
# of Agency Adoptions Completed	0	0	3	5
# of Non-Agency Adoptions Completed	0	0	0	3
# of Infants Affected by Substance Abuse	0	0	0	2
# of Child Family Team Meetings	20		11	

Adult Services	Oct-26	FY-YTD	Oct-25	FY-YTD
# of Adult Protective Services Reports	21	104	19	64
# of APS Reports Accepted for Evaluation	20	76	16	36
# of Representative Payees	16		19	
# of Current Guardianship Cases	22		22	
# of Adult Care Homes	2		3	
# of Unclaimed Bodies	0	1	0	0
# of Medicaid Transportation Clients	119		112	
# of Transit Accepted Trips	89	302	46	197
# of Transit Denied Trips	31	118	6	18
# of Medicaid Clients Reimbursed Trips	19	93	15	52
# of Reimbursed Trips	68	192	35	109
# of Third Party Trips	31	118	not tracked	not tracked

Child Support Enforcement — Fiscal Year

	Oct-26	FY-YTD	Oct-25	FY-YTD
# of Active Cases	557		576	
# of Paternity	1	20	4	10
# of Orders Established	8	33	13	38
# of Modifications Completed	0	1	0	10
# of Enforcement Actions Completed	34	137	13	107
# of Locate Actions Taken	10	42	12	45
Amount of Collections	$86,840.71	$351,811.66	$94,084.59	$373,860.42
ARREARS — Total Outstanding	**$2,688,454.29**		**Collected FY-YTD Arrears**	**$71,927.27**
Inherited Arrears	**$869,429.70**			
Outstanding Purge Amounts	**$202,393.81**			

Economic Services — Fiscal Year

	Oct-26	FY-YTD	Oct-25	FY-YTD
# of Medicaid/Special Assistance Appl Taken	227	889	225	938
# of Medicaid/SA Recerts completed	514	1634	544	1825
# of Medicaid Participants	10,873		11,125	
# of Special Assistance Participants	63		57	
# of TANF Participants	9		10	
# of FNS Applications (applications denied)	184 (41)	712 (190)	155 (52)	576 (175)
# of FNS Recerts completed	145	671	180	752
# of FNS Benefits Paid	$674,863.00	$2,545,561.00	$708,795.00	$2,843,478.00
# of FNS Households	2,048		2,211	
Fraud Collections	$103.00	$652.02	$349.00	$1,169.00
# of Day Care Recipients	84		131	
# on Day Care Waiting List	0		0	
Energy Assistance (Heating/Cooling)				
LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program) Appl Taken	0	0	0	0
LIEAP Benefits Paid	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
CRISIS Applications Taken	22	77	22	62
CRISIS Benefits Paid	$5,513.62	$15,964.81	$6,041.65	$14,688.84

Personnel

Vacancies/Hires/Terminations for October 2026			Vacancies
New Hires	2		(10) as of October 31, 2026
New Hire Orientations Completed	2		**NOTE**: (1) of the vacancies are new positions approved for FY27
Interagency Transfers	1		
Separations	1		
Promotion or Work/Against	1		
Reason for Separation	( ) Retirement; ( ) Relocation; ( ) Dismissal (X) Resignation		
Length of Service	(X) Less than 2 yrs.; ( ) 2-5 years; ( ) 5-10 years; ( ) over 10 years		