CHEROKEE COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
4800 West U.S. Highway 64, Murphy, NC 28906
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Cherokee County N.C. Department of Social Services

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes
For
August 18, 2026

5:00 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.

I. Call to Order

Chair Phillips called the meeting to order at 4:59 P.M.
Members Present:
Bo Phillips – Chair
Dr. Catherine Yost - Member
James Jallah – Member

II. Approval of the Agenda

At the request of the Chair, two items were added to the agenda. Under Old Business, Item B. Adding "Be the Village Update." Under New Business adding Item C. Discussion on Alternate Work Arrangements. Dr. Yost made the motion to amend, seconded by Mr. Jallah and approved unanimously.

III. Adoption of Minutes

Dr. Yost motioned that the minutes for July be approved as presented, seconded by Mr. Jallah and approved unanimously.

IV. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

V. Old Business

A. Farm Bill Update

Director McGee presented an Update on the FARM Bill.

Director McGee presented an update regarding the impact of H.R. 1 and ongoing advocacy related to the Farm Bill and SNAP. She reported that the 25% reduction in federal reimbursement comes to approximately 158,000 for Cherokee county. When coupled with the potential benefit cost share tied to the PER, the county

would have to significantly increase its request for county funding to make up the difference. North Carolina counties are working aggressively to reduce the SNAP Payment Error Rate (PER), which declined from 10.21% in Federal Fiscal Year 2024 to 7.36% in FFY 2025, while simultaneously implementing significant policy, technology, training, and business-process changes required by H.R. 1. Director McGee discussed the substantial financial impact on all 100 North Carolina counties, including the loss of approximately $69 million annually in federal administrative funding beginning October 1, 2026. Director McGee advised that NCACDSS is advocating for Farm Bill language delaying implementation of the SNAP benefit cost-share requirement until Federal Fiscal Year 2030, allowing North Carolina additional time to complete system modernization and reforms and achieve a sustained PER below 6%. Director McGee asked the Board to continue advocating with state and federal partners for this delay in order to protect county resources, staffing capacity, and timely access to benefits for eligible families.

B. Community Awareness Event

Dr. Yost provided an update on the Adoptions/ Foster care Be The village Event which is scheduled for October 17th from 4:00 – 7:00 PM at the Hackney Warehouse. Dr. Yost advised that planning is underway for a Silent Auction and for special event T-Shirts. Child Care will be available if needed. The event is going to be an exciting evening highlighting the good work of long-time foster parents and the need for adoptive families.

VI. New Business

A. **Strategic Planning**

Director McGee presented a revised working draft of the DSS Strategic Planning Population and Service Analysis, developed from agency data, Board reports, and public population data, with additional input to be gathered through staff and community surveys, focus groups, and Commissioner feedback. The analysis identifies significant demographic and service trends, including projected growth in the population over age 65 and increasing workload and service intensity across CPS, APS, intake, and eligibility programs. Director McGee reviewed the staffing and organizational implications of these trends, including the importance of maintaining appropriate supervisory capacity, addressing eligibility caseloads that are currently at or beyond capacity, strengthening fiscal and administrative backup, and planning for future intake and leadership needs. The Board also discussed the increasing APS and intake activity, changing state and federal requirements, caseload pressures, and the potential financial and legal risks associated with insufficient staffing, including audit findings and program paybacks. Facility limitations were also identified as a consideration in future workforce planning. Director McGee emphasized that the completed analysis is intended to provide a data-driven foundation for the agency's long-term strategic plan and to identify actions necessary to ensure DSS has the organizational capacity to meet future community needs

B. **Alternate Work Arrangements**

The Board discussed a proposed expansion of the Alternate Work Arrangements (AWA) policy which would allow certain job categories to work 100% remotely with conditions. The proposal is a strategy to improve employee retention and remain competitive with other employers offering remote work. The Director presented a preliminary concept that would allow eligible, experienced employees with at least ten years employment as Income Maintenance III caseworkers, who demonstrate consistent satisfactory performance, to work remotely on a full-time basis, while continuing to report to the office as needed for training, meetings, supervision, and other in-person responsibilities. Members discussed the possibility of moving toward a five-year eligibility rather than ten years in order to incentivize longevity more realistically, noting that ten years is a very long time. The Board discussed potential benefits including retention of experienced staff, limited office space, reduced commuting costs, work-life balance, and providing a meaningful longevity incentive. Members also discussed fairness, accountability, supervision, and the ability to monitor employee performance. The Director noted that Income Maintenance work is measurable through existing systems, day sheets, caseload data, report cards, and other performance indicators. The discussion broadened to overall recruitment and retention challenges, including compensation, housing affordability, workplace flexibility, and the need to consider incentives across DSS program areas. The Board requested information regarding the performance of employees currently utilizing remote work arrangements and agreed that a revised policy, along with supporting performance data, would be presented for further consideration at the September DSS Board meeting.

VII. Management Reports

A. Supervisor Reports

Child Welfare Supervisors Jocelyn Ellis Fournier and Gabby Grant provided an update on CPS staffing, caseloads, and performance. CPS is nearing full staffing, with one assessment position remaining to be filled, currently filled through a contract arrangement. Three social workers are currently completing pre-service training, and a new bilingual social worker has joined the agency in a position supporting both CPS and APS. At the time of the report, CPS had 28 open cases, including 27 assessments and one in-home case. Supervisors reported a significant increase in CPS reports, from 31 in July of the prior year to 52 in July of the current year, resulting in workers temporarily carrying approximately seven to eight cases compared with the typical caseload of approximately five. The increase was attributed in part to changes in intake screening policy requirements. Supervisors emphasized continued efforts to support and retain staff and reported positive feedback from state consultants.

Staff also reported on the successful Back-to-School Bash, which served more than 400 community members and included approximately 28 community partners and vendors offering activities and services for families. Despite the event ending early

because of severe weather, participation exceeded expectations. Planning has begun for next year's event, which is anticipated to be held in Andrews to improve accessibility for families on that side of the county.

The Board continued discussion regarding workforce recruitment and retention challenges, including limited applicant pools and competition from employers offering higher salaries and remote work opportunities. Potential strategies discussed included increased workplace flexibility, remote work where appropriate, broader advertising and recruitment efforts, and consideration of incentives across agency departments. The importance of retaining experienced employees and institutional knowledge was emphasized.

The Board also discussed continued collaboration between DSS and the Sheriff's Department. The Director reported that the agencies maintain a strong working relationship but identified a need for renewed cross-training due to staffing changes and evolving issues, including current drug trends. Members emphasized the value of ongoing interagency training to ensure appropriate responses to child and adult safety concerns.

Additional staff updates and recognition were provided. The Board also received clarification regarding changes in fraud collection amounts and discussed the SunBucks program, which was identified as a pass-through program rather than a DSS-funded program.

VIII. DHHS MOU Data – April

Deferred to September – Reports not available

IX. DSS Service Report

Report reviewed and accepted.

X. Staff/Unit Accomplishments

Jessica Watkins was nominated for statewide Manager of the Year.

XI. Adjourn

Chair Phillips moved the meeting to be adjourned at 6:27 PM. So moved, seconded by Mr. Jallah and passed unanimously.

CCDSS Board Report

SERVICE MONTH: August 2026

Budget — Fiscal Year

	Aug-26	% of Budget	Aug-25	% of Budget
Total Revenues (YTD)	$1,062,304.95	27.7%	$465,090.47	10.8%
Total Expenses (YTD)	$4,174,452.77	39.9%	$3,977,852.67	37.4%
Expenses without settlement	$1,245,881.34	14.4%	$1,049,281.24	12.2%

Services — Fiscal Year

Child Welfare	Aug-26	FY-YTD	Aug-25	FY-YTD
# of Child Abuse Reports Received	35	87	36	67
# of Screened In Reports	21	54	18	35
# of Screened out Reports	14	33	18	32
# of Other County Assists	4		4	
# of Open Assessments on last day of month	30		23	
# of Open In-Home (Case Mgmt.) Services Cases	1		3	
# of Children Entered Into Legal Custody	2	2	2	2
# of Children Left Custody	0	0	1	1
# of Children In Legal Custody	33		32	
# of Children Placed With Relatives	10		7	
# of Children Placed in Foster Homes/Other Placements	23		23	
# of Foster Care 18-21	4		2	
# of Licensed Foster Homes	10		10	
# of Agency Adoptions Completed	0	0	1	1
# of Non-Agency Adoptions Completed	0	0	0	0
# of Infants Affected by Substance Abuse	0	0	1	1
# of Child Family Team Meetings	8		20	

Adult Services	Aug-26	FY-YTD	Aug-25	FY-YTD
# of Adult Protective Services Reports	27	59	22	41
# of APS Reports Accepted for Evaluation	16	44	13	23
# of Representative Payees	16		18	
# of Current Guardianship Cases	20		23	
# of Adult Care Homes	2		3	
# of Unclaimed Bodies	0	1	0	0
# of Medicaid Transportation Clients	120		115	
# of Transit Accepted Trips	56	120	51	106
# of Transit Denied Trips	36	47	5	10
# of Medicaid Clients Reimbursed Trips	21	51	11	24
# of Third Party Trips	36	47	not tracked	not tracked

Child Support Enforcement — Fiscal Year

	Aug-26	FY-YTD	Aug-25	FY-YTD
# of Active Cases	554	554	570	567
# of Paternity	11	14	4	11
# of Orders Established	8	17	10	47
# of Modifications Completed	0	0	0	6
# of Enforcement Actions Completed	34	57	31	528
Amount of Collections	$91,650.21	$176,389.20	$82,186.33	$930,992.08
ARREARS — Total Outstanding	**$2,666,102.35**	**Collected FY-YTD Arrears**		**$38,060.90**
Inherited Arrears	**$851,694.69**			
Outstanding Purge Amounts	**$221,690.87**			

Economic Services — Fiscal Year

	Aug-26	FY-YTD	Aug-25	FY-YTD
# of Medicaid/Special Assistance Appl Taken	236	447	244	468
# of Medicaid/SA Recerts completed	365	861	468	988
# of Medicaid Participants	10,743		11,104	
# of Special Assistance Participants	59		56	
# of TANF Participants	10		7	
# of FNS Applications (applications denied)	176 (55)	334 (95)	156 (37)	335 (85)
# of FNS Recerts completed	156	339	175	376
# of FNS Benefits Paid	$612,557.00	$1,243,957.00	$721,198.00	$1,432,300.00
# of FNS Households	2,009		2,242	
Fraud Collections	$183.02	$251.02	$340.00	$627.00
# of Day Care Recipients	116		155	
# 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	24	38	13	20
CRISIS Benefits Paid	$5,019.09	$7,147.68	$4,036.73	$5,078.17

Personnel

Vacancies/Hires/Terminations for July 2026			Vacancies
New Hires	4		(12) as of August 31, 2026
New Hire Orientations Completed	4		**NOTE**: (3) of the vacancies are new positions approved for FY27
Interagency Transfers	1		
Separations	4		
Promotion or Work/Against	0		
Reason for Separation	( ) Retirement; (X) Relocation; (X) Dismissal (X) Resignation		
Length of Service	(X) Less than 2 yrs.; ( ) 2-5 years; ( ) 5-10 years; ( ) over 10 years		