



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

Cherokee County N.C. Department of Social Services

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

June 16, 2026

5:00 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 PM by Chairman Bo Phillips

Members present:

Bo Phillips – Chair

Dr. Catherine Yost, Member

James Jallah, member, (via telephone)

II. Approval of the Agenda

The Board amended the agenda to move Item F from New Business to become Item C under Old Business. The Board also amended the agenda for Item F under New Business to be listed as Commissioners.

Motion: Dr. Catherine Yost made a motion to amend the agenda as presented and adopt the agenda. Mr. James Jallah seconded the motion.

III. Adoption of Minutes

Director McGee requested that the Board amend the agenda to include discussion regarding DSS Board meeting dates and times.

The Board amended the May 2026 Board Meeting Minutes under VI. New Business, Item B. Community Awareness Event – Adoptions.

The sentence was revised to read:

The initiative includes hosting an annual community event focused on recognizing foster parents, educating the public regarding foster care and adoption, and celebrating adoptive families.

Motion: Mr. James Jallah made a motion to amend the May 19, 2026 meeting minutes as presented and adopt the amended minutes. Dr. Catherine Yost seconded the motion.

IV. Public Comments

There were no public Comments

V. Old Business

A. DSS Strategic Planning

Director Amanda McGee provided the Board with an update on the Cherokee County DSS Strategic Planning Initiative. An example invitation email for the initiative was shared with Board members. Director McGee reported that she has received a response from Dr. Tipton at Tri-County Community College (TCCC) regarding participation in the planning process.

The Board discussed the need to confirm with Chairman Bo Phillips the anticipated timeline for developing the strategic plan. The planning process is expected to include focus groups, surveys, questionnaires, and both individual and group discussions to identify the long-term vision for Cherokee County DSS over the next 5, 10, 15, and 20 years.

Board members discussed organizing a dedicated strategic planning meeting for the following month. The first meeting will focus on presenting current agency data, projected community needs, and the future direction of the agency. Discussion will include anticipated staffing needs, mandated and non-mandated services, and how the agency can best meet the needs of Cherokee County in the years ahead.

The Board identified the following major service areas to be included in the strategic planning process:

1. Eligibility Services
2. Adult Protective Services (APS) and Child Protective Services (CPS)
3. Child Support Services
4. Additional agency program areas, for a total of approximately five key service categories.

The Board also discussed the following planning recommendations:

- Conduct surveys prior to the strategic planning meeting.
- Board members and Director McGee will collaborate to develop the survey questions.
- Invite approximately 18–20 participants to serve on the planning group.
- Include members of the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners in the survey process.
- Hold the strategic planning session at Tri-County Community College (TCCC).
- Provide a meal for participants during the planning session to encourage participation and collaboration.

No formal action was taken. The Board will continue planning efforts and finalize the timeline and participant list at a future meeting.

B. Community Awareness Event

Director Amanda McGee reported that there were no new updates regarding the Community Awareness Event. The Board will continue to receive updates as planning progresses.

C. DSS Board Meeting Date/Time

The Board discussed changing the regular DSS Board meeting date and time to the fourth Tuesday of each month at 5:00 p.m.

Director Amanda McGee was instructed to contact all Cherokee County Commissioners to determine whether the proposed meeting date and time would accommodate their schedules. The Board will revisit the proposed change after receiving feedback from the Commissioners.

No action was taken pending the Commissioners' responses.

VI. New Business

A. Energy Outreach Plan

Director Amanda McGee presented the Energy Outreach Plan to the Board and provided an overview of the Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) and the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP). She explained the purpose of the outreach plan and answered questions from the Board regarding the programs and the agency's participation.

Director Amanda McGee and Chairman Bo Phillips signed the required documentation to participate in the Energy Outreach Program and to authorize the distribution of outreach materials and information regarding available services.

Motion: Dr. Catherine Yost made a motion to approve the Energy Outreach Plan as presented. Mr. James Jallah seconded the motion.

B. HB 1144

Director Amanda McGee provided an update regarding House Bill 1144 (HB 1144) and the circumstances surrounding the Moody death investigation in Mecklenburg County. A copy of the legislative session information was provided to Board members for review.

Director McGee reported that the North Carolina General Assembly held a hearing regarding the matter, which lasted approximately seven to eight hours. During the hearing, legislators questioned Mecklenburg County and state child welfare officials regarding the circumstances surrounding the case and child welfare practices.

Director McGee shared that Mecklenburg County leadership, Mecklenburg County DSS leadership, and representatives from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) were called to participate and provide information as part of the legislative review process.

Discussion was held regarding concerns identified within the child welfare intake process, including DHHS data related to percentages of records where standard intake questions were not properly addressed. Director McGee explained that intake decisions can be subjective and may vary based on the information received and assessed at the time of the report.

Director McGee noted that there is currently not a statewide training program dedicated solely to DSS intake practices.

Director McGee shared that the proposed legislation would establish an escalation team within NCDHHS to provide additional review and support for high-risk child welfare cases that meet identified criteria. The proposed legislation includes recurring funding of \$550,000 beginning in fiscal year 2026-2027, along with additional federal funding, to support the creation of the escalation team.

C. SNAP Letter

Director McGee reported that she submitted a letter to Legislature requesting consideration for a reduction in the county's required reimbursement amount due to the financial impact and the challenges associated with the county being able to sustain the cost.

D. NCACDSS Network Development Initiative

Director Amanda McGee provided an update regarding the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services (NCACDSS) Network Development Initiative, with a focus on addressing the shortage of therapeutic placement options for children in care.

Director McGee reported that she has participated in efforts to bring together a committee to address the challenges related to laws, rules, policies, and decision-making processes impacting the child welfare system. The goal of the initiative is to collaborate across systems and develop a pathway toward building a more effective and sustainable placement system for children and families.

Discussion was held regarding the need for increased collaboration with Local Management Entities/Managed Care Organizations (LME/MCOs) and other partners to identify resources and share responsibility for addressing the shortage of therapeutic placement options. Director McGee noted that engaging LME/MCO partners may assist in addressing funding and service needs through a collaborative approach.

E. 36 Hour Work Week

Director McGee reported that the County Commissioners are considering exploring a 36-hour work week option across county departments due to budget concerns related to increasing employee compensation, including longevity pay and entry-level salary adjustments. She noted that a similar proposal was presented by the Health Department approximately three years ago.

Discussion was held regarding the importance of ensuring that any reduced work schedule would apply consistently and could not be limited to select employees within departments.

Supervisors would be responsible for ensuring that all required work, services, and operational responsibilities are completed regardless of the schedule structure.

The Board discussed that, if approved, a 36-hour work week could provide a potential benefit for employee recruitment, retention, and work-life balance while continuing to meet the needs of the community.

F. Commissioners

Discussion was held regarding recognizing the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners for their support of the recent 1% tax increase, which allowed funding for a 3% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for county employees and adjustments to the pay plan based on years of service.

Board members discussed the possibility of showing appreciation to the Commissioners for their support and acknowledging the positive impact of these decisions on county employees.

It was suggested that a statement of appreciation be made during an upcoming Commissioners' meeting. Chairman Bo Phillips stated that he would make the statement on behalf of the DSS Board.

VII. Management Reports

A. Supervisor Reports

There were no supervisor reports presented.

B. DHHS MOU Data April

Director McGee presented the May DHHS MOU data report. All performance measures meet or exceeded required standards.

C. DSS Service Report

Director McGee presented the May Service Report.

D. Staff /Unit Accomplishments

Adult Protective Services (APS) Supervisor Daunita Maennle provided an update on recent accomplishments and activities within the APS unit.

Supervisor Maennle reported that APS Social Worker Judy Newton participated in community activities supporting APS clients, including attending the Special Olympics in Swain County in April and May. Ms. Newton was able to support clients who participated and provided encouragement during the events. Ms. Newton also attended the IOI Track and Field Day, where she connected with clients, cheered them on, and supported their participation.

Supervisor Maennle reported that APS Social Worker Jeremy Lance continues to work with a guardianship case for a 30-year old. Mr. Lance has been actively involved in supporting the individual's goals and advocating for increased independence. Mr. Lance identified a potential support person who shares similar interests with the client

and is exploring whether the individual may be willing to participate in the client's support network.

Supervisor Maennle shared that the entire APS unit participated in the Elder Abuse Awareness Walk in Cherokee County, showing support for elder abuse prevention and community awareness efforts.

Board Member Mr. James Jallah commended Supervisor Maennle and the APS team for their work. Mr. Jallah shared that he continues to communicate with APS clients and stated that he has received positive feedback and high praise regarding Supervisor Maennle's dedication and the quality of services provided to clients.

VII. Adjournment

Motion: Dr. Catherine Yost made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. James Jallah seconded the motion.