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CHEROKEE COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

4800 West U.S. Highway 64, Murphy, NC 28906

828-837-7455

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**Cherokee County Department of Social Services**

**Board Meeting**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**June 17, 2025**

1. **Call to Order**

The regular meeting of the Cherokee County Department of Social Services was duly held on June 17, 2025, at 5:00 P.M., both in person at 4800 West Highway 64, Murphy, N.C. 28906 and virtually via Microsoft Teams.

**Board Members Present:**

Dr. Catherine Yost, Member

Bo Phillips, Member

James Jallah, Member

Pat Ivie, Member

**Staff present:**

Amanda T. McGee, Director

Andria Duncan, Attorney

Mendy Lance, Adult Medicaid Supervisor

Michele Chastain, Family and Children Medicaid Supervisor

Katrina Plemmons, Food and Nutrition Supervisor

Jessica Watkins, Child Support Supervisor

Rebecca Mullins, Child Protective Services Supervisor

Brandy Clonts, Administrative Officer

**Guests:**

County Attorney, Darryl Brown

1. **Discussion and Adoption of Agenda**

**•Motion to Adopt Agenda:** Mr. James Jallah made a motion to adopt the agenda. Mrs. Pat Ivie seconded. All voted in favor.

1. **Meeting Minutes**

**•Motion to Approve Minutes:** Mrs. Pat Ivie made a motion to approve the May 20, 2025 meeting minutes. Mr. James Jallah seconded. All voted in favor.

1. **Public Comments**

None

1. **Old Business**
   1. **NC Path Implementation Progress**

* Director McGee commended the Child Welfare staff for their excellent work in learning and adapting to the new NC PATH system and policies.
* Program Manager Tracy Jones noted that the most significant challenge has been navigating both the new system and the updated policies simultaneously. She shared that staff are continuing to learn intricacies of the system, especially around immediate response reports.
* There has been an increase in number of cases being screened in as immediate reports.
  1. **Cherokee County Court Improvement**
* Attorney Andria Duncan addressed the importance of timely permanency and the need for improved tracking, emphasizing its critical role in court proceedings. She noted a key discussion with Judge Forga and acknowledged that delays in permanency have been a persistent issue in this judicial district for over 34 years.
* The state is under significant pressure—especially from federal authorities—to expedite permanency for children who have been in foster care for over 24 months. Many of these children have a need for higher levels of care due to their trauma experiences and many do not have an identified permanent placement.
  1. **N.C. General Assembly – Bills of Interest / State / National Interest Topics**
* Discussion included the HOP (Healthy Opportunities Pilot) program, which was designed to test and evaluate select evidence based non-medical interventions related to housing, food, transportation, and interpersonal safety and toxic stress to high-needs Medicaid enrollees. The program is currently not included in the proposed budget, which could have a devastating impact on individuals and families relying on these critical supports.
  1. **Federal Budget Update**
* Director Amanda McGee shared a recent email update with the board regarding the federal budget and its potential impact on DSS Medicaid operations.
* Unlike many agencies where staff are assigned to specific tasks, McGee highlighted that CCDSS Medicaid staff are universal case workers—handling all aspects of applications and recertifications from start to finish. The added verification requirements in the OBBBA would place a significant burden on the work loads of staff and could impact processing times and service delivery. Additional staff to carry the increased work load may be necessary when and if these changes are approved.
  1. **Safety Threat Analysis**
* The development of a plan to evacuate the DSS building in the event of an active shooter incident, or any serious threat to safety, is scheduled to be completed in July 2025.
* A new intercom system is scheduled for installation in July to improve internal communication during emergencies.
* Four new security cameras have been installed to increase surveillance and facility safety.
* A cybersecurity drill will be conducted to educate employees on recognizing and responding to potential cyber threats, with a focus on protecting sensitive data systems.

1. **New Business**
2. **Energy Outreach Program**

* FNS Supervisor Katrina Plemmons provided an overview of the two primary energy assistance programs:
  + LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program): A one-time credit applied directly to the client’s energy account.
  + CRISIS Program: Provides emergency assistance for clients at immediate risk of utility disconnection.
* Supervisor Plemmons reported that CRISIS funds have been exhausted for the current program year. Due to policy changes from the previous year, the department has accepted a higher number of applications this season. Clients who are income-eligible and at risk of losing energy services still qualify under the updated policy guidelines.
* **Motion to sign the Energy Outreach Plan**: Mr. James Jallah made a motion to sign the Energy Outreach Plan. Mrs. Pat Ivie seconded. All voted in favor.

1. **Financial Audit – No Findings**

* Director Amanda McGee commended Finance Officer, Miriam Aguero for her outstanding work. The financial records were noted to be well-organized and received high praise from the auditor

1. **DSS Board Candidate Conflict of Interest**

* Director Amanda McGee created a conflict of interest disclosure form for board applicants to submit with their applications. The form includes items such as past employment, close family or client relationships, and other manageable conflicts.
* County Attorney Darryl Brown recommended adopting a formal Code of Ethics for board members. He will provide a copy of the Commissioner’s Ethics Statement that he authored for review.
* Director McGee stated that an ethics statement will be brought back for discussion at the next meeting.
* **Motion to Table**: Mrs. Pat Ivie made a motion to table the discussion until the next meeting. Mr. James Jallah seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

1. **Supervisor Program Updates**
   1. **Child Support** 
      * Child Support Supervisor, Jessica Watkins reported that the current Child Support team has been in their roles for only 11 months. Despite their relatively short tenure, the team has performed exceptionally well—the only county in Region 1 to meet all performance goals. Meeting these goals is significant, as it increases the state incentive funds received and reduces the county’s financial share of program costs.
   2. **Medicaid**
      * Adult Medicaid Supervisor Mendy Lance and Family & Children’s Medicaid Supervisor Michele Chastain reported strong performance across key measures, with a current accuracy rate of 98.7% (95% is the benchmark).
      * Adult Medicaid disability applications have decreased significantly—from approximately 30 applications per month to just 3 per month.
   3. **Food and Nutrition Services (FNS)**
      * FNS Supervisor Katrina Plemmons reported that the FNS unit is now fully staffed**.**
   4. **Child Welfare Services**
      * Program ManagerTracy Jones reports that there has been no staff turnover in CPS since January 2025, contributing to team stability and consistency in service delivery.
      * Both CPS and Permanency Planning numbers remain strong, reflecting ongoing progress and performance.
      * Director Amanda McGee explained that the two social work positions dedicated to CQI would be sent to the OSHR via the classification process (smartsheets PD118) to determine if a reclassification to Quality Assurance Specialist I, II, or III would be more appropriate. Those positions are classed at a higher grade than the social work positions. If the positions are reclassified, the difference in pay of the positions would come from the amount budgeted for paid internships, which would be eliminated.
      * The contract with Allies for Outcomes will remain in place, continuing their partnership and support for child welfare initiatives.
2. **DHHS MOU Data**
   * + Director Amanda McGee provided the DHHS Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) data for board members to review. All programs under the MOU are in compliance with the performance measures.
     + Members were encouraged to review the data and bring any questions or comments to the next meeting.
3. **DSS Service Report / Retention Data / Staff / Unit Accomplishments**
   * + Director Amanda McGee reported that the employment retention rate from July 1, 2024, to the current date is 24%.
     + Service Report sent to all board members in advance for review.
4. **Adjourn**
   * + **Motion to Adjourn:** Mr. James Jallah made a motion to adjourn. Mrs. Pat Ivie seconded. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 PM.