

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR

DEV DUTTA SANGVAI
SECRETARY

August 14, 2025

Corey Balance, Sr., Chair of the Board of Bertie County Commissioners
Juan Vaughan, Manager of Bertie County
James Lee, Chair of the Bertie County DSS Board
Daphne Little, Director, Bertie County DSS

Dear Mr. Balance, Sr., Mr. Vaughan, Mr. Lee, Ms. Little:

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has been working with the Bertie County Department of Social Services (BCDSS) since December 3, 2024, after NCDHHS became aware of the fatality of a child previously involved with BCDSS. After a review of the fatality and additional cases, BCDSS was placed on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) on March 21, 2025 due to serious concerns involving the administration of child welfare services in the county.

Since that time, NCDHHS has communicated with BCDSS leadership on the immediate actions to be implemented by BCDSS to ensure child welfare services are provided in accordance with law, rule and policy. NCDHHS has conducted numerous on-site visits with BCDSS over the last several months, including meetings with the County Manager, and with Director Little, Attorney Beaman, and the DSS Board regarding the specifics of the fatality case and concerns about the ability of leadership to ensure the safety and welfare of the remaining children. NCDHHS has provided BCDSS with explicit directions and expectations for management of the case moving forward through the CAP and subsequent engagements. Yet, BCDSS has failed to address our expressed concerns with child welfare practice as it relates to that case and has failed to present to the court how the handling of the case by BCDSS contributed to the ongoing safety risks for the children. BCDSS has acted in direct contradiction to the obligations to provide protective services under Chapter 7B of the General Statutes and outside the scope of their agency relationship with NCDHHS.

The mismanagement of this case and failure of BCDSS to adhere to the directives of NCDHHS has magnified our concerns about BCDSS's ability to adequately assess child safety and risk that is vital to the protection of all children in Bertie County. NCDHHS also has serious concerns about the accuracy, integrity and transparency of information provided by the child welfare staff of Bertie County DSS at all levels of the organization.


Considering this information in totality, I have determined that the Bertie County Department of Social Services is not providing child welfare services in accordance with law, rule and policy; further, the failure to provide these services in accordance with law, rule and policy poses a substantial threat to the safety and welfare of children in Bertie County. Accordingly, pursuant to my authority under N.C. Gen. Stat. § 108A-74(h), NCDHHS will begin assuming temporary direct operation of child welfare services in Bertie County on **Friday, August 15, 2025**.

When NCDHHS assumes operations for this interim period, the Bertie County DSS Director shall be divested of her service delivery powers under N.C. Gen. Stat. § 108A-14 and all other powers under state law that pertain to child welfare services.

There is much work to be done to bring Bertie County DSS into compliance with our state laws, rules and policies. Given the critical work performed by our child welfare system, and the urgency we face, NCDHHS is taking this action to help stabilize Bertie County child welfare services. It is our expectation that NCDHHS and Bertie County can work collaboratively to ensure the families and children of Bertie County are provided with appropriate services, in accordance with law, rule and policy. Prior to our arrival, we will provide you with additional details and information so that we all can be prepared to move forward, together.

We would like to give you the opportunity to be heard and address any questions or concerns you may have regarding this plan of action, or to provide us with any additional information that you believe important for NCDHHS to know. Please contact Lisa Cauley 919-527-6401.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

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Devdutta Sangvai, MD, JD, MBA
Secretary, NCDHHS

Cc: Michael Leighs, Deputy Secretary for Opportunity and Well-Being
Lisa Tucker Cauley, Division Director Human Services
Julie Cronin, General Counsel