



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR

DEV DUTTA SANGVAI
SECRETARY

September 15, 2026

Corey Ballance, Sr., Chair
Bertie County Board of Commissioners

Juan Vaughan, County Manager
Bertie County

Yolanda White, DSS Director
Bertie County Department of Social Services

Dear Chairman Ballance, Manager Vaughan, and Director White,

On August 15, 2025, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) assumed temporary direct administration of child welfare services in Bertie County following the identification of serious concerns regarding child safety, missed Child Protective Services reports, documentation inaccuracies, and supervisory failures, as outlined in our August 14, 2025 communication.

Since that time, NCDHHS has worked intensively with Bertie County leadership, the Bertie County Board of Social Services, county partners, and child welfare staff to stabilize operations and rebuild core practice aligned with North Carolina law, rule, and policy. The progress achieved reflects meaningful improvement and commitment by county leadership and child welfare staff.

During the state's temporary administration, the following key activities were completed:

- Review of all open child welfare cases to assess safety, risk, and necessary interventions.
- Establishment and maintenance of weekly supervisory case staffing across assessment and permanency.
- Implementation and documentation of monthly supervisory conferences to ensure consistent quality improvement and oversight.
- Completion of Structured Decision-Making (SDM) training by staff to guide safety and risk assessments.
- Full implementation of PATH NC for Intake and Assessments, enhancing transparent assessments and documentation.
- Retraining and skill development in completing eligibility assessments for federal Title IV-E funding for youth in foster care, to ensure reimbursement accuracy.
- Strengthening of permanency planning practices, including preparation for court.
- Reestablishment of community partnerships and transparency with courts, GAL, Child Fatality Prevention Team/Community Child Protection Team, and allied agencies.

As part of the transition back to county administration, NCDHHS reviewed overall practice functioning. Bertie County has demonstrated **meaningful improvement** in areas such as:

- Screening and response to CPS reports according to policy.
- Timely initiation of cases.
- Use of SDM tools and behavior-specific safety plans.
- Completion of required contacts with children.
- Consistent supervisory oversight, including weekly staffing and monthly conferences.
- Alignment of case decisions with structured practice expectations.
- Strengthened permanency planning through timely court preparation and enhanced engagement with court personnel.
- Accurate reimbursement processes and implementation of PATH NC for case management.

These improvements reflect notable progress in safety practice, supervision, documentation, permanency planning, and compliance with statewide expectations.

While these improvements are significant and commendable, sustained progress in child welfare requires ongoing vigilance, consistent supervisory engagement, and continued adherence to structured practice expectations. Sustainability will depend on active involvement by the DSS Director and leadership team, continued coaching and oversight, and ongoing internal monitoring.

NCDHHS will maintain continuing review and support for Bertie County DSS following the return of authority. This will include periodic case evaluations, practice guidance, and collaborative problem-solving with county leadership.

NCDHHS acknowledges the hard work of Bertie County DSS leadership, staff, and partners throughout this transition. With continued commitment to structured practice, supervision, and quality improvement, Bertie County is positioned to move forward confidently and responsibly.

NCDHHS is prepared to conclude the temporary state assumption of authority and return child welfare administration to Bertie County DSS effective September 16, 2026, with continued technical assistance and monitoring as outlined above.

The notable improvement in safety planning and service intervention for children in Bertie County who are involved in the child welfare system, as well as the enhanced documentation and supervision of this work, reflect upon the diligent efforts by Bertie DSS staff, Bertie County leadership and NCDHHS staff working collaboratively. We will continue to support the ongoing professional development of county staff through monthly consultations and technical assistance. Together, our efforts will further enhance the safety and well-being of children and families in Bertie County.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

Devdutta Sangvai

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Devdutta Sangvai, MD, JD, MBA
Secretary

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Lisa Tucker Cauley

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Lisa Tucker Cauley
Division Director, Human Services

cc: Carla West, Interim Deputy Secretary for Opportunity & Well-Being
Julie Cronin, General Counsel
Donna Fayko, Deputy Director for Child Welfare
Ben Rose, Lead Regional Director
Brandy Mann, Regional Director
Meredith Houchins, Interim Section Chief for County Operations