



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR

DR. DEVDUTTA SANGVAI
SECRETARY

May 13, 2025

Ms. Sandy Weaver, Director
Vance County Department of Social Services
500 North Beckford Drive, Suite C
Henderson, NC 27536

Ms. Renee Perry, County Manager
Vance County
122 Young Street, Suite B
Henderson, NC 27536

Dr. Leonard Frieson, Chairman
Vance County Social Services Board
500 North Beckford Drive, Suite C
Henderson, NC 27536

Dear Director Weaver, Manager Perry and Chair Frieson,

On June 3, 2024, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) became aware of a case that revealed concerning social work practices that did not align with law, rule or policy. As part of the investigation of that case, NCDHHS completed a comprehensive review of social work practice at the Vance County Department of Social Services (VCDSS) and found violations that directly impact the safety of children in Vance County. The violations discovered included but are not limited to:

- Inability to make appropriate screening decisions in 30% of cases
- Inadequate safety assessments that did not ensure the safety of children in 33% of cases
- Required contacts with parents and children to ensure safety as required by policy were only completed in 50% of cases
- Case decisions were not supported by documentation and were not appropriate in 50% of the cases reviewed

As a result of the findings from the review, VCDSS was placed on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) on July 29, 2024. The CAP focused on improving safety planning and supervision to assure the protection of children in Vance County.

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Even with the CAP in place, VCDSS has exhibited a continued failure to assure the safety and wellbeing of the children of Vance County due to poor management and oversight of social work practice. The county has failed to hire and maintain staff at necessary levels to provide protective services for the children of Vance County. Recent developments during our involvement with VCDSS have revealed that the agency does not have the governance structure to manage the day-to-day work and to address significant deficiencies in the provision of protective services to children. Concerns about safety planning have continued, creating a substantial risk to children, and have led to children being harmed.

In a letter to you dated April 25, 2025, NCDHHS identified three critical areas of concern, including:

- Organizational structure and coverage for child welfare functions,
- Quality of safety decision-making, and
- The ability of the director to lead the agency based on available resources, agency culture and community engagement.

To ensure that the county could deliver protective services, NCDHHS deployed staff to VCDSS on April 25, 2025. Additional experienced staff were added through contract agencies. This has allowed the county to address a number of cases to make contact with children and families. NCDHHS staff continue to actively work Vance County CPS cases, which has further revealed the inability of the agency director to formulate a comprehensive plan to assess and prioritize safety planning for children. Since NCDHHS began assisting with protective services in Vance, 40 existing cases were identified as high risk and yet no contact had been made with those families by VCDSS staff. While the VCDSS director has been supportive of NCDHHS' presence onsite and assisting VCDSS in providing child protective services, she has not exhibited the leadership necessary to stabilize child welfare in the county and to address other challenges that exist in the agency. At present, NCDHHS has reached the limit of our ability to continue to make progress without divesting the director of her authority over child welfare and assuming temporary control of child welfare, thus enabling NCDHHS to take on direct staffing and case decisions.

In light of this additional information, I have determined that the VCDSS is not providing child welfare services in accordance with law, rule and policy, and further, the failure to provide these services poses a substantial threat to the safety and welfare of children in Vance County. Accordingly, pursuant to my authority under N.C. Gen. Stat. § 108A-74(h), NCDHHS will begin assuming direct operation of the child welfare services in Vance County effective Wednesday, May 14, 2025.

When NCDHHS assumes operations, the Vance 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.

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There is significant work to be done to protect children and bring Vance County DSS into compliance with our state laws 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 Vance County. NCDHHS takes seriously the health and well-being of children, and it is our hope that we can work collaboratively to ensure that the families and children of Vance County are provided with appropriate services, in accordance with law, rule and policy. Prior to our arrival on May 14, we will provide you with additional details and information so that we all can be prepared to move forward, together.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Lisa Tucker Cauley, Division Director of Human Services, at (919) 527-6401.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

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Devdutta Sangvai, Secretary, NCDHHS

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