

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR SESSION – July 21, 2025**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, July 21, 2025, in the Commissioners' Board Room, 69 N. Main Street, Marion, NC.

**Members Present**

Chairman, Tony Brown; Vice-Chair, Lynn Greene; David Walker, Trisha Garner

**Members Absent**

Patrick Ellis

**Others Present**

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Madalyn Robinson, Clerk to the Board; Carla Reid, Social Work Program Administrator;

**Call to Order**

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 11:30 am.

**Introduction of SW Program Administrator**

Mr. Wooten gave an overview of the new SW Program Administrator position and introduced Ms. Carla Reid. Mr. Wooten explained that the new position is over Child Protective Services and Adult Services. Carla Reid, social work program administrator, expressed her appreciation and excitement for the new position. Ms. Reid suggested looking for ways to increase retention and support new hires as the agency moves forward in a positive direction.

Mr. Wooten addressed the need for staff with DSS. All counties compete for the same limited pool of applicants, and the role of the County is to do what we can to be competitive. This includes competitive pay and a strong reputation. Commissioner Walker made a motion for Mr. Wooten to recommend a plan in 30 days to retain DSS workers. The motion request includes financial compensation, bonuses, and other benefits to retain these employees. Chairman Brown requested an investigation into the issues in the department that can be addressed. Mr. Wooten stated that the salary is competitive with Burke's. Commissioner Walker requested staff recommendations to see that these are addressed. Chairman Brown stated that issues may have been corrected already, and there needs to be time to allow these changes to catch up. Commissioner Garner seconds the motion put forth by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the recommendation passes.

## **DSS Update**

Mr. Wooten gave an update on DSS. Mr. Wooten stated his gratitude to Ms. Reid. Child Protective Services, now having direct leadership, will be more streamlined and easier to address problems that might come up.

Mr. Wooten stated that letters have been sent to the congressional representatives regarding the federal (OBBA) changes that were discussed at the previous meeting. Mr. Wooten referred to the Path NC Program and stated that Ms. Reid's staff will all have to go through training on the Path NC program. Within the last two years, the County has entered into the Traverse (adult and child services) program, a user-friendly program that has offered digitization of records. The state is now introducing the Path NC program (solely CPS) and will be implemented on August 10<sup>th</sup>. This program will mostly be intake and assessments to start, and later in the fiscal year, more components will roll out. A group of Counties has already entered into the system. Mr. Wooten stated that after a year of using the Path NC program, they will compare it to the Traverse program and use whichever program is more beneficial. Mr. Wooten stated that all Counties will turn over to Path NC. The training for the Path NC program is four days a week for two weeks. Vice-Chair Greene asked if the training was in-house, and Ms. Reid stated it is a regional training within driving distance.

Commissioner Garner asked about the conversation with Mr. Silver and what Mr. Silver thought about the impacts of the federal legislation. Mr. Wooten stated that Mr. Silver said McDowell is the first County to reach out to him for concerns. Commissioner Garner asked about the four-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar impact and where this figure came from. Mr. Wooten stated the number is based on the SNAP administration cost if the County were to take the remaining twenty-five percent. As of now, SNAP is 50% federal and 50 % nonfederal. Moving forward, legislative changes will shift this from 75% nonfederal and 50% federal. Commissioner Walker asked if there had been any conversation with Daniels and Greene. Mr. Wooten said that he's aware of the state having briefings on possible impacts from DHHS. This is a \$230,000 cost (for current staffing), an increased dollar amount that the County would be responsible for to keep the current levels where they are. Mr. Wooten referred to the current error rate, and 5-6% would be passed on to the states. The state of NC would be responsible for the higher program cost if it decides to absorb the cost, or it can be passed down to the County level. There is a lot of uncertainty regarding this issue. Commissioner Walker asked for data that models the eligibility requirement for the folks requesting this assistance in McDowell. Mr. Wooten stated that he has not seen that data yet, but there is a similar older study for Medicaid. The concern is regarding the challenge that will remain for people who do qualify for this assistance due need for the community to meet the requirements of the law. Mr. Wooten referred to the MATCH program and mentioned how the community helpers will be needed more. It will be a lot of work for those folks to continue receiving these benefits. Commissioner Garner asked if they lost the Medicaid benefits, could they still apply for the Affordable Care Act? Mr. Wooten referred to the "Donut Hole" and stated that it's a possibility for folks who were receiving credits and discounts to apply for private insurance but may not receive those same credits and discounts as before.

Mr. Wooten relayed that the state is going to have to come up with a system that will fix this and all states will have to do this. This will take time, and a year is probably not enough time. The currently enrolled folks need to pay attention to these changes. Mr. Wooten stated that volunteer opportunities might be an option, allowing the community to respond to this.

There are wins and losses when legislative changes happen. Mr. Wooten stated that advertising needs to happen, and people need to be made aware of these changes. Commissioner Garner stated the requirements are being put on able-bodied people, and she wants to help explain the impact of these changes. Mr. Wooten stated that these changes might allow for better volunteer organizations; however, there are impacts outside of our local community that folks need to be aware of. Mr. Wooten stated the costs could impact NC and the Medicaid spending. There are things to watch and a need to be better understood as it relates to the impacts on rural hospitals and healthcare providers. Chairman Brown and Commissioner Walker discussed the need for vetting for Medicaid and SNAP programs. Mr. Wooten stated he wanted to provide ample information regarding these legislative changes.

### **CHSA Proposal Update**

Mr. Wooten went over the CHSA Proposal Update and noted the discussion on a consolidated Human Service model. Three departments come to mind to change: DSS, the Senior Center, and Transit. The three are typically consolidated into Human Services. There was discussion about the Health Department. As of now, we are a part of the Foothills Health District. Research within the past month has been focused on the cost and comparing costs to what some peers are budgeting. Mr. Wooten relayed that costs for Counties similar to McDowell in size are included in the memo. Some of what is done with these comparisons encompasses more than what McDowell has. As of now, McDowell is budgeting six hundred and sixty thousand a year. McDowell's peers budget anywhere from \$740,000 (Davie County) to \$1.4 million (Haywood County).

Vice-chair Greene asked if they could determine the cost of including the health department at a later date if they decide to move forward with this. Commissioner Garner asked who owns the Health Department Building, and Mr. Wooten relayed that the County owns the building. Mr. Wooten stated that the County is footing the bulk of the maintenance costs, and the district does not put money into the building, but they do rent out some of the excess space in the building. Commissioner Walker stated that he was not in agreement with the rental spaces being used. Chairman Walker asked for a number if the County were to pull out of the district. Vice-chair Greene stated that his motivation for moving forward with the model as is today is to create structure for agencies involved and looking at the health department's finances. Commissioner Greene made a motion to approve the model as presented, with additional studies regarding pulling out of the Health District and maintaining the current DSS Oversight Board (The Board of Commissioners). Commissioner Walker seconded this motion. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passes.

Mr. Wooten stated that the next step for the consolidated model is a public hearing and asked what meeting they would prefer for the public hearing. After some discussion, the commissioners agreed that the morning meeting would be preferred due to the lighter agenda. Mr. Wooten stated that he would like to discuss this with the health director. Vice-Chair Greene asked for a time frame for getting the consolidated model in place. Mr. Wooten noted that the time frame is dependent on the public hearing, but he will be working on tightening up the personnel policies in the meantime. Commissioner Walker asked for the reporting model with these changes in place. Mr. Wooten stated that the recommendation would keep the same staff and setup. Commissioner Walker asked about the salary vacancy that is available to put towards these changes. Mr. Wooten stated that the salary will need to be adjusted to reflect these changes in responsibility.

### **Administrative Items**

Chairman Brown requested the addition of the County waste issue to the agenda.

Mr. Wooten stated that the two budget items were included (SP1 and a Reimbursement Resolution). SP1 is the School Project Fund related to the Helene relief funding received by the school system. The education system is receiving some Helene relief money. The Reimbursement Resolution for \$130,674 for Emergency Services vehicles was also discussed. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve these amendments as presented, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passes.

The second is a tax amendment. Mr. Wooten referred to the memo from Mrs. Wylie. Ms. Wylie has provided a late application for the Lawson family and a refund request from the Kelley family. She is recommending against approval of the late application since she does not believe there is a compelling reason. Regarding the refund request, this has been a challenging PTC appeal and she asks for an immediate decision once the PTC order is received. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the refund as presented and take staff recommendations on the Lawson appeal, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passes.

Chairman Brown brought up the solid waste issue that citizens have made complaints about and discussed health issues that have arisen from these issues, such as rodent problems. Chairman Brown requested hiring a person to handle the County's waste issues and requested a study to be done on how to fix this issue. Chairman Brown recommended attacking the issue differently via fines and tax liens. Commissioner Walker asked if there was a policy in place. There is an ordinance enforced by the Sheriff's Department, and they will allow sixty to ninety days to clean the property up. Mr. Wooten stated that reports are received from the Sheriff's Department on these issues. Mr. Wooten relayed that fines collected for ordinance violations typically must be remitted to the school system. Mr. Wooten stated that the County can clean up properties, and the bill will become a lien on the property. Commissioner Walker asked if the County could move forward and place a lien on the property, given how things stand now in the trash ordinance. Mr. Wooten said he would bring this information request back to the board after research has been done into the matter. Chairman Brown stated there would be a greater response from people if their property were to acquire tax liens. Commissioner Walker stated he agreed with Chairman Brown and that another position would need to be created. Chairman Brown made a motion to charge Mr. Wooten with finding a solution to the solid waste problem in the County. This motion is seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a motion of 4-0, the motion passes. Mr. Wooten stated he would discuss the issues with Mr. Harmon about the ordinance options and would bring back the information requested.

### **Adjournment**

Commissioner Walker made a motion to adjourn at 12:35 p.m., with a second by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, this motion passes.

Attest:

---

Madalyn Robinson  
Clerk to the Board

---

Tony Brown  
Chairman