



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

JOSH STEIN • Governor

DEVDUTTA SANGVAI • Secretary

LISA TUCKER CAULEY • Division Director, Human Services

May 20, 2026

Dr. Kimm Campbell, Deputy County Manager
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Ms. Letecia Loadholt, Interim Director
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Mr. Mike Bryant, County Manager
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Mr. Mark Jerrell
Chair, Board of County Commission
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SENT BY EMAIL AND CERTIFIED MAIL

Dear Director Campbell, Interim Director Loadholt, Manager Bryant, and Chairman Jerrell,

On December 16, 2025, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services (NCDHHS DSS) was made aware of a child fatality that occurred in Mecklenburg County on December 16, 2025.

Per N.C.G.S. 108A-74, NCDHHS DSS has the authority to evaluate a county department of social services' provision of child welfare services; it is expected that the delivery of services must be in accordance with applicable state laws, rules, and policies.

On January 16, 2026, an NCDHHS DSS Child Fatality Reviewer conducted a file review of the fatality case. The record was reviewed utilizing the appropriate program monitoring tool that specifically determines if the county DSS followed law, rule, and policy. The review of the fatality case revealed concerns with Mecklenburg County Department of Social Service's (MCDSS) child welfare practice, which include violations of applicable state laws, rules and policies as defined:

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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- Of the total number of screened out reports, 4 out of 5 reports met the definition of abuse and neglect for this family and were screened out with no further assessment of safety of the children.
- Contacts were not frequent enough to ensure safety.
- Child Protective Services (CPS) history was not reviewed, which would have shown a pattern of abuse and neglect.
- Lack of thorough assessment of the child's medical, developmental and physical environmental concerns.
- Collaterals significant to the case, to include medical personnel, were not contacted.
- Inaccurate case decisions were made that resulted in no services being provided to ensure safety of the children.

As a result of the fatality file review of child welfare practice findings, NCDHHS DSS began a review of screening and assessment case decisions across a sample of records unrelated to this fatality case. This review included 58 reports screened out for no further assessment and 64 reports screened in, as well as the follow-up assessments. The records were reviewed utilizing the appropriate program monitoring tool that specifically determines if the county DSS followed law, rule, and policy.

While the review of the 122 CPS reports/assessments revealed some strengths in social work practice, a broad, systemic lack of appropriate safety planning to address identified danger indicators and risk factors to the children was found. Further, ongoing contacts with families were not sufficient to ensure safety and risk. Supervisory oversight of case workers with all required elements did not occur to ensure solid social work practice.

The review of the CPS reports revealed the following violations of law, rule or policy:

- In 52% of intakes, intake workers did not ask sufficient questions to explore all alleged maltreatment. These intake questions are necessary to obtain critical information from the reporter that assists with discerning between abuse and neglect and determining appropriate response timeframes.
- Reporter notification letters were not sent within 5 days of the CPS intake in 37% of the intakes.
- In 36% of cases where reports contained allegations that may have met the criminal definition of child abuse, case files did not contain verbal and written notification to the District Attorney and law enforcement.

The review of the 64 assessments revealed the following violations of law, rule or policy:

- Safety assessments had safety plans that were adequate to ensure safety in only 43% of the cases.
- Face-to-face contacts with children occurred at 48%; mothers at 52%; fathers at 34%; non-resident parents at 53%. This includes diligent efforts to locate children and parents.
- 45% of the cases did not document or show efforts to conduct separate interviews with children regarding safety.
- 64% of cases contained supervisory oversight at a minimum of every other week; 58% of cases did not contain all required components of quality oversight.

MCDSS is required to develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) to address these violations within 30 days of this letter. The required CAP must be developed collaboratively with NCDHHS DSS using the attached template. NCDHHS DSS will review the CAP and provide feedback within 10 business days of receipt.

The CAP must include, but is not limited to, the following:

- A plan for how the agency will ensure the current safety of children with an open child protective services case.
- Training for all staff with demonstrated ability to identify the safety risks to children when there are allegations of abuse and neglect.
- Ongoing coaching between supervisors and staff to ensure transfer of learning to skill development.
- Training for all staff with demonstrated ability to plan for the safety of children when direct safety threats are identified, to include following the Regional Abuse and Medical Specialists' guidance on applicable cases.
- Written protocols and processes to ensure accurate completion of and tracking for case initiations, ongoing contacts, and completion of all structured decision-making (SDM) tools.
- Written protocols and processes to effectively utilize the internal Quality Assurance Team to identify trends from file reviews and develop training to address deficits in policy, practice and knowledge.

- Leadership develop strategies for providing ongoing and effective supervisory oversight for supervisors and social workers.
- Training for all supervisors and social workers in quality documentation and tracking to ensure that documentation is completed thoroughly and entered timely.
- Ensure staff participate in state trainings identified to address areas needing improvement.

The Director must provide monthly updates that describe the actions taken to fulfill the corrective action plan. These updates will be made to the Regional Child Welfare Specialist during their biweekly or monthly onsite visits and documented using the corrective action plan template. The first update to the corrective action plan will be due 30 days after the corrective action plan is accepted by NCDHHS DSS.

Once all components of the corrective action plan are successfully implemented, the Division will provide the county with a letter of completion, ending the corrective action plan.

This letter also serves as notice to the Director that should the county fail to show progress in remedying the deficiencies noted in the corrective action plan within six months from the date of the plan, the Division will follow up with a letter to the board of county commissioners, the county manager, and the board of social services pursuant to N.C.G.S. 108A-74(a5). This follow-up letter will confirm that NCDHHS shall not be liable for any claim that may arise from the county DSS director's failure to comply with any law or rule identified by the Secretary.

NCDHHS DSS works to support county departments of social services with policy interpretation, practice guidance, and technical assistance. Failure to comply with this notice or further violations that impact the safety, permanence, and well-being of children in your child welfare services program may result in the Department of Health and Human Services moving to invoke provisions under N.C.G.S. 108A-74(h):

If the Secretary of Health and Human Services determines that a county department of social services is not providing child protective services, foster care services, or adoption services in accordance with State law and with applicable rules adopted by the Social Services Commission, or fails to demonstrate reasonable efforts to do so, then the Secretary may intervene by divesting the director of oversight of Child Welfare Services and assuming direct oversight of provision of child welfare services for the county.

NCDHHS DSS remains committed to assisting counties reach their performance standards to come into compliance with law, rule and policy. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at 984.303.2256 or donna.fayko@dhhs.nc.gov.

Sincerely,



Donna F. Fayko

Deputy Director for Child Welfare services

Cc: Mike Leighs, Deputy Secretary for Opportunity and Well-Being
Lisa Tucker Cauley, Division Director, Human Services
Gail Carelli, NCDHHS Assistant General Counsel
Tammy Shook, Interim Assistant Deputy for Child Welfare Services
Meredith Houchins, Interim Section Chief for County Operations