

REPORT

Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group, Stage One Final Report

March 2018

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Executive Summary

In 2017, the North Carolina General Assembly established the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (SSWG) and directed it to develop recommendations for improving state supervision of the county-administered social services system through the use of a new system of regional state offices. The SSWG was also charged with making recommendations in several other areas. This work is one piece of a larger reform initiative that is focused on (1) high-quality and consistent service provision across all counties, (2) accountability to ensure that all local agencies are providing high-quality services, and (3) transparency of local agency performance and outcomes.

What Are the Supervisory Functions of the Proposed Regional Offices?

The SSWG identified and defined the following core functions involved with supervising North Carolina's county-administered social services system:

- Best practice dissemination
- Compliance monitoring
- Fiscal monitoring
- Integrated data systems and recordkeeping
- Interagency coordination
- Policy guidance and technical assistance
- Quality improvement
- Staffing standards and support
- Training

The group also made recommendations regarding how responsibility for each supervisory function should be allocated across the three levels of government involved: central, regional, and local.

How Should Regional Offices Be Staffed?

The SSWG agreed on several principles that should guide staffing for regional offices.

- Regions must have high-quality, experienced, and reliable staff.
- Regions must serve all social services programs.
- Resource allocation will vary from region to region.
- Each region will have
 - a regional director;
 - administrative support staff;
 - program consultants who specialize in certain social services programs; and
 - staff who provide technical assistance that is not program-specific, such as human resources, budgeting, and information technology.
- Some staff positions currently in the central office will shift to regional offices.

What Are Key Factors to Consider When Dividing the State into Regions?

The SSWG recommends that the state have five to seven supervisory regions. The group is not recommending a specific map of supervisory regions because there are many elements of the system that are currently in transition. Rather, the group identified the following key factors that should be taken into consideration when the final map is developed by DHHS or the legislature.

- No county should be split into different regions.
- Regions should include contiguous counties.
- Judicial districts should not be disrupted.
- Total population and population served by each region should be comparable.
- Total geographic size should be comparable.
- Regions should strive to preserve natural networks that have developed over time.

How Might Local Elected Officials Be Involved in Oversight and Governance?

The SSWG identified options for increasing the involvement of local elected officials in the oversight and governance of local departments of social services. The options fall along a timeline that starts when the agency is created and ends when the state is required by law to temporarily assume responsibility for administration because the agency has been out of compliance and failed to correct a significant problem. Many of the options would require legislation, but several could be implemented now.

What Other Recommendations Were Developed by the SSWG?

- **Consistency across regions.** DHHS should be deliberate in designing a regional system that promotes consistency across regions.
- **Accountability of regional offices.** DHHS should establish a formal mechanism to allow local social services directors and county managers to provide direct feedback to central office staff on the performance of the regional office and the regional director.
- **Physical space for regional offices.** DHHS should consider creative options for physical space, including sharing space with other agencies or organizations and allowing home-based staff in some circumstances.
- **Oversight body.** DHHS and the legislature should consider directing the SSWG to assume responsibility for ongoing oversight of the regional system to ensure that reforms are on track to achieving stated objectives.
- **Studies.** There should be further study of (1) the impact of recent changes to organization and governance on agency performance and (2) state supervision of and support for legal representation of local social services agencies.

I. Project Background

In 2017, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted expansive legislation related to social services system reform and improvement.¹ One part of the legislation requires that the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) develop a plan for improving service delivery and outcomes at the local level through enhanced oversight, support, and inter-county collaboration. In developing its plan, DHHS is required to take into consideration recommendations made by the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (SSWG). The work of the SSWG is divided into two stages, and this report is the product of the group's discussions during the first stage.

A. What Is the SSWG's Charge?

During Stage One, the group must offer recommendations regarding

- the size, number, and location of regional state offices;
- the allocation of responsibility between central, regional, and local officials in supervising and administering social services programs;
- methods for holding the regional offices accountable for performance and responsiveness;
- information-sharing between the regional offices and the boards of county commissioners regarding local department performance; and
- options for authorizing the board of county commissioners to intervene in program administration prior to the state assuming direct control of service delivery.

During Stage Two, the SSWG will build on some of the concepts discussed in the first stage to develop recommendations regarding

- legislative and regulatory changes necessary to improve collaboration between counties, specifically addressing information-sharing, conflicts of interest, and intercounty movement of clients, and
- a vision for transitioning the state from a county-administered system to a regionally-administered system. Note that the group is not required to develop proposed legislation on this topic. Rather, the group expects to have a high-level discussion of this idea in order to identify the benefits and challenges associated with making such a transition.

The work in both stages will address the full range of social services programs—including child welfare, adult services, economic services, and child support enforcement. These are all multi-faceted programs that offer many services to millions of people across the state. For example, the broad umbrella of “economic services” encompasses food and nutrition services, Medicaid, Work First, State-County Special Assistance, energy assistance, and other programs. Within each program, there are additional layers and processes, such as intake, service provision, and program integrity. The SSWG is not able to consider each program or program layer in any detail. Rather, the goal is to take an expansive systems-wide view to address the questions presented in the legislation.

The Stage One report is due by April 15, 2018. The work on Stage Two will begin shortly thereafter, with the report being due February 1, 2019.

1. S.L. 2017-41 (H.B. 630), *as amended by* S.L. 2017-102 (H.B. 229).

B. Who Is on the SSWG?

The legislation sets forth the composition requirements for the SSWG. The members listed below were appointed and served throughout Stage One.

- Three members of the Senate appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate
 - Senator Tamara Barringer, co-chair
 - Senator Kathy Harrington
 - Senator Joyce Krawiec
- Three members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives
 - Representative Sarah Stevens, co-chair
 - Representative Jonathan C. Jordan
 - Representative David R. Lewis
- Three representatives from DHHS appointed by the DHHS Secretary or the Secretary's designee
 - Susan Perry-Manning, Deputy Secretary for Human Services
 - Michael Becketts, Assistant Secretary for Human Services
 - Lisa Cauley, Deputy Director, Child Welfare Services, Division of Social Services
- One designee of the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court
 - Honorable Robert Stiehl, Chief District Court Judge, Cumberland County
- Four county commissioners representing the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC), each of whom shall represent different regions of the State, appointed by the President of the NCACC
 - Commissioner Kevin Austin, Yadkin County
 - Commissioner Brenda A. Howerton, Durham County
 - Commissioner Page Lemel, Transylvania County
 - Commissioner Robert (Bob) Woodard, Dare County
- Two county social services directors, one appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and one appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives
 - Christopher (Chris) C. Dobbins, Gaston County (Senate appointee)
 - Glenn Osborne, Wilson County (House appointee)
- One representative from the North Carolina Association of Social Services Attorneys (NCASSA), appointed by the President of the NCASSA
 - Angie Stephenson, Orange and Chatham Counties
- One representative from the Association of North Carolina County Social Services Directors, appointed by the President of the Association
 - Susan Osborne, Alamance County

The legislation directs the UNC School of Government (SOG) to convene the SSWG, facilitate its meetings, and provide administrative and technical support to the effort. The SOG team included faculty members Aimee Wall, Margaret Henderson, and Sara DePasquale, as well as research associate Ryan Kelly and data analyst Jack Watts. The team also contracts with Andrew Sachs from the Dispute Settlement Center to assist with meeting planning and facilitation. The SOG team convened and facilitated SSWG meetings, conducted legal and policy research and key informant interviews, convened focus groups to clarify issues essential to the SSWG's work, and drafted the Stage One Report.

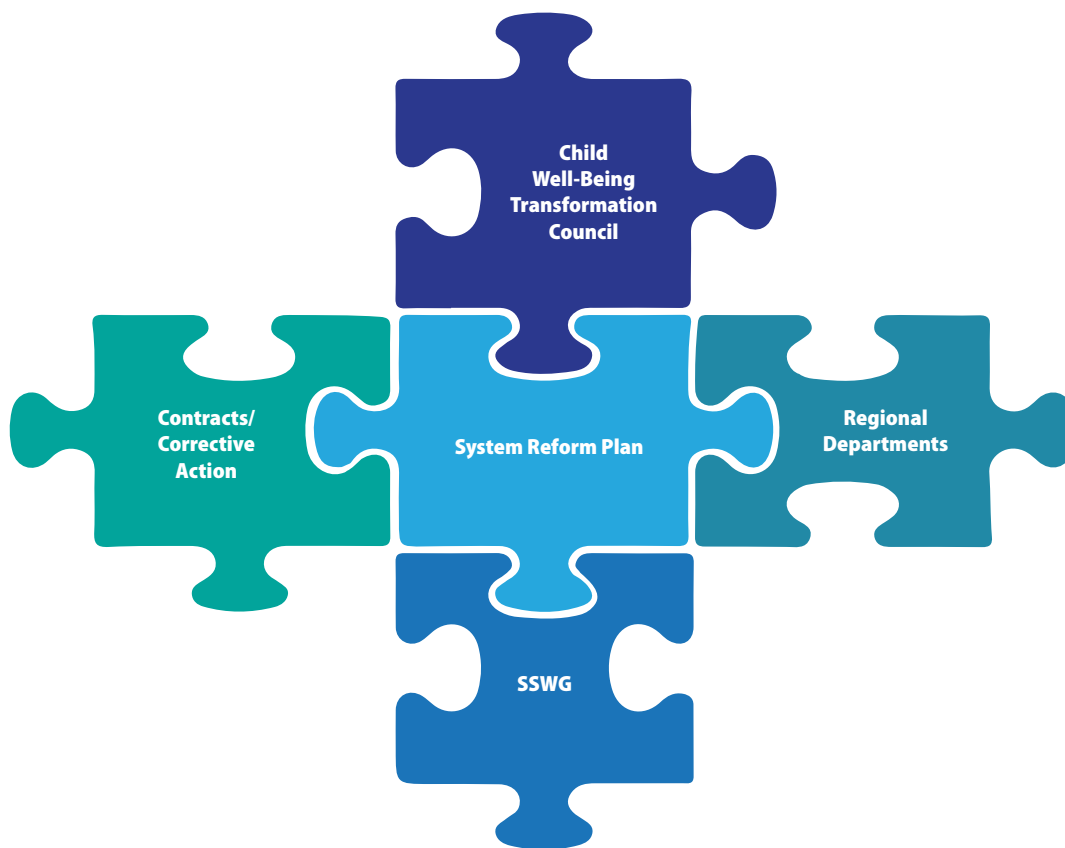
The SSWG held eleven meetings between October 2017 and March 2018. Seven meetings were held at the SOG building in Chapel Hill and were made available via webcast (both live and recorded). Four meetings were convened as webinars. All meeting materials, minutes, and recordings are available online.²

C. How Does the SSWG's Work Relate to the Other Components of Social Services System Reform?

As mentioned above, the legislation creating the SSWG was a multi-faceted law that impacts the social services system in several different ways. There are five main components to the reform of the system, as depicted in Figure 1, below.

In short, these puzzle pieces illustrate a series of connected efforts that, when implemented, will result in changes at the state level as well as changes in the relationship between the state and the counties. It is important to note that the SSWG is not involved in any of the other components of the “puzzle” described below. These descriptions are included to provide context for the work the SSWG is undertaking.

Figure 1. The Five Key Pieces of Social Services System Reform



2. See the linked headings under the main “Social Services Working Group” heading on the UNC School of Government’s Social Services microsite at <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services>.

The central piece, referred to as “system reform plan,” correlates with a section of S.L. 2017-41 that directs the state to contract with an outside organization to undertake a comprehensive review of the state agencies responsible for supervising social services programs.³ The contractor is also required to develop a “dashboard” that will allow both the state and the general public to monitor programs and services county by county to ensure “maximum accountability and transparency and the effective and efficient use of social services and funds.”⁴ This system reform effort will focus on changing the way the state approaches and evaluates its work. The work of the SSWG builds on that effort by providing a framework for improving the connection between the state and the local agencies responsible for administering social services programs.

The “contracts/corrective action” piece of the puzzle refers to a section of the legislation that requires the state to enter into written agreements each fiscal year with the local agencies responsible for administering social services programs. These written agreements apply to all social services programs other than Medicaid and N.C. Health Choice (a state health insurance program covering low-income children). The written agreements, which will begin in fiscal year 2018–19, will focus on “mandated performance requirements and administrative responsibilities.”⁵ Once the dashboard is operational, its measures are to be integrated into the performance requirements specified in the written agreement.

A related concept referenced in that same puzzle piece is a new framework for corrective action. Beginning in March 2020, the legislation provides that the state and a local agency will be required to develop a joint corrective action plan if (1) the local agency is out of compliance with the written agreement or applicable law for a specified period of time or (2) DHHS determines that an urgent circumstance requires immediate attention. If DHHS determines that the local agency has not been successful in implementing the corrective action plan, the legislation directs the state to temporarily assume local administration of the social services program that is involved.

The top puzzle piece, the Child Well-Being Transformation Council, refers to a new committee that was created to provide a forum for high-level oversight of all public services for children, with the primary goal of improving coordination, collaboration, and communication among agencies and organizations involved. The initial members are expected to be appointed by July 1, 2018.

The last puzzle piece refers to new authority for counties to voluntarily join together to create regional, rather than single-county, departments. Beginning in March 2019, counties will be able to establish a regional department to provide some or all of their social services programs. For example, several counties could join together to create a new regional child support enforcement agency. The North Carolina Social Services Commission, an appointed rulemaking body, is charged with developing regulations that will specify the required level of county funding for these regional departments.

The legislation creating the SSWG included many inter-related components that, taken together, have the potential to make significant changes to North Carolina’s social services system. The combined effort is designed to ensure (1) high-quality and consistent service provision across all counties, (2) accountability to ensure that all local agencies are providing high-quality

3. On March 2, 2018, DHHS announced that the contract was awarded to the Center for the Support of Families. See Press Release, DHHS, Vendor Selected to Assist with North Carolina’s Social Services Reform (Mar. 2, 2018), <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/news/press-releases/vendor-selected-assist-north-carolina%E2%80%99s-social-services-reform>.

4. S.L. 2017-41, § 2.1.(d).

5. *Id.* § 3.1.(a1).

services, and (3) transparency of local agency performance and outcomes. A more detailed summary of the entire bill is included in Appendix A. The rest of this report will focus exclusively on the topics assigned to the SSWG for Stage One.

II. Overview of North Carolina's Social Services System

The term “social services” refers to a variety of programs and services that are intended to assist vulnerable or at-risk populations in achieving safety, stability, wellness, and independence. Many business and non-profit organizations are actively involved with providing social services in their communities. For the purposes of this report, however, the term “social services” will refer only to those programs that are currently administered by county social services agencies.⁶ Some of these programs provide assistance that addresses personal needs, some provide assistance that addresses financial needs, and some provide assistance that addresses both personal and financial needs.⁷

Federal law establishes the framework for many of these social service programs. States accept federal funding for programs and are required to comply with the federal laws that govern those funding streams. States have some flexibility in deciding how they want to administer the programs. North Carolina utilizes a state-supervised, county-administered system to deliver social service programs. In this model, local social services agencies take on the primary role of day-to-day program administration. The state provides supervision, direction, and support to the local agencies.

North Carolina's state-supervised, county-administered system is rooted in a long history. Before the Social Security Act of 1935 formalized the role of the states in the provision of public assistance programs, counties provided most of the governmental services and assistance to those in need. As the responsibility of the state government began to expand after 1935, many states chose to transition to state-administered social services systems.⁸ Some state-administered systems engage local governments in some or all aspects of program administration, while others may not involve local governments at all, instead relying on state infrastructure to address local needs (e.g., district or regional offices).

6. In most counties, this agency is the social services department. As of January 2018, twenty-four counties provided social services through a consolidated human services agency. See UNC School of Government, *PH and SS Organization and Governance: Resolution as of January 2018*, <https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/CHSA%20map%201.2018.pdf> (map of North Carolina showing various types of county agencies).

7. For a full discussion of the types of services offered by local social services agencies, see Aimee N. Wall, *Social Services, in* COUNTY AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA (UNC School of Government, 2nd ed. 2014). A PDF version of this chapter is available at https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/Social%20Services%20-%20CMG_0.pdf.

8. See, e.g., Peter D. Shearer, NEB. DEP'T SOC. SERVS., THE TRANSITION TO STATE ADMINISTRATION: NEBRASKA'S EXPERIENCE (Dec. 14, 1984), <http://govdocs.nebraska.gov/epubs/W2000/B020-1984.pdf>.

By choosing to remain a state-supervised, county-administered system, North Carolina is now in the minority. Most states identify as being state-administered,⁹ and of these states, all have some regional and/or county presence. Of those that identify as county-administered, like North Carolina, there are different approaches to managing supervision. The SSWG took a closer look at some of these states to learn more about how they manage state supervision and how regional offices are involved.¹⁰ This research informed some of the SSWG's recommendations that follow.

The SSWG also gathered information about and discussed North Carolina's own experience with regional supervision. From 1974 to approximately 2002, the state had four regional offices.¹¹ According to a 1982 legislative study, almost 70 percent of staff time in those offices was dedicated to direct service and technical assistance, and about 27 percent of staff time was focused on quality control.¹²

Based on feedback from focus groups, interviews, and SSWG discussions, the previous regional system was valuable and effective because the regional staff

- developed a deep understanding of the individual counties in each region,
- made regular and valuable contact with the director and staff, and
- were available in urgent situations for consultation and assistance.

One of the biggest challenges encountered with the previous regional system in North Carolina was the lack of consistency in policy interpretation and practice across the state. Each region developed some independence from the central office and, as a result, the counties across the state did not always receive the same information and guidance. Other states with regional supervision teams echoed that same concern and developed some strategies for addressing it. The SSWG's recommendations take this challenge into account and include measures designed to prevent this type of fragmentation.

Even though the formal, comprehensive regional office model no longer exists in North Carolina, DHHS still has a strong regional presence in many of its programs. Some programs, such as adult services, child welfare, and child support enforcement, have field staff working from their own homes who are assigned to monitor compliance and provide technical assistance to specific groups of counties. Some programs, such as economic services, rely primarily on staff from the central office to travel out to the counties to monitor compliance and provide technical assistance. In addition, there are several regional DHHS offices that serve specific purposes, such as an office in Martin County that serves as a call center for the food and nutrition program and an office in Black Mountain that houses DHHS staff involved with licensing foster homes.

9. One report from a division of the North Carolina General Assembly stated that North Carolina is one of eleven states that have a state-supervised, county-administered system. See N.C. GEN. ASSEMB., PROGRAM EVALUATION DIV., STATUTORY CHANGES WILL PROMOTE COUNTY FLEXIBILITY IN SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION: FINAL REPORT TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE, Rep. No. 2011-03 (May 2011), www.ncleg.net/PED/Reports/documents/DSS/DSS_Report.pdf. See also U.S. DEP'T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS., ADMIN. FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES, ADMIN. ON CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES, CHILDREN'S BUREAU, CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY, STATE VS. COUNTY ADMINISTRATION OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICES (2012), <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/services.pdf>.

10. For profiles for Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Georgia, see the "Materials" linked heading under the "Meetings" linked heading on the UNC School of Government's Social Services microsite at <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials>.

11. These offices were located in Black Mountain, Winston-Salem, Fayetteville, and Greenville.

12. See N.C. LEGIS. RES. COMM'N, REGIONAL STATE OFFICES: REPORT TO THE 1983 GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA 10 (Jan. 6, 1983), <https://ncleg.net/Library/studies/1983/st10198.pdf>.

III. Summary of the SSWG's Work and Recommendations on Key Issues

The work of the SSWG in Stage One focused on answering several key questions:

- What are the goals for an effective system of supervision?
- What core functions are involved with supervising the social services system?
- How should those core functions be allocated across the three levels of government (central, regional, and local)?
- What types of staff and support should be available through the regional offices?
- What factors should guide policymakers when dividing the state into supervisory regions?
- What are some examples of regions that are consistent with these factors?

In addition to answering these questions about the new regional system, the working group discussed and identified opportunities for local elected officials to become more involved with social services, especially when the agency is facing challenges.

Below is a brief review of the working group's conclusions and recommendations related to each of the questions and issues identified above.

A. What Are the Goals for an Effective System of Supervision?

This initial question provided the foundation for all of the work that followed. The group first explored the qualities of a good supervisor generally and then extrapolated those qualities to think about supervision needs at a system level. One of the major themes for all of these conversations was that the concept of supervision was about both support and oversight. The group agreed that in order for a supervisee to be successful, the supervisor must provide the tools and ongoing assistance to ensure success. That framework is essential to system-wide supervision as well. It is not only about the enforcement or penalties but also about the infrastructure, communication, information, problem-solving, and support the state can provide.

The group identified the following goals for the system:

- consistency in interpretation and application of laws, regulations, and rules;
- provision of clear policy guidance and technical assistance;
- clear definition of roles and responsibilities both across the three levels (central, regional, local) and within the regional offices;
- responsiveness to local needs in a way that is timely, efficient, and consistent with law and policy;
- relationships across the three levels that are both productive and trusting;
- fairness in oversight and enforcement;
- accountability at all three levels;
- transparency and accessibility for counties and the public regarding law, policy, and practice; and
- support and leadership related to
 - fiscal stewardship (control, efficiency, and accountability);
 - innovation, problem-solving, and conflict resolution;
 - quality assurance and improvement;
 - effective technology tools; and
 - strategic prioritization across programs and services.

These over-arching goals served as a reference for the SSWG as its work progressed. The process of the work sessions was designed around these goals, and the products were evaluated against them.

B. What Core Functions Are Involved with Supervising the Social Services System? How Should Those Core Functions Be Allocated Across the Central, Regional, and Local Levels?

To answer this question, the working group reviewed research related to North Carolina's current social services supervisory functions and those in selected other states. The research was based on document reviews as well as on interviews with current and former social services directors and state agency staff. After several rounds of discussion, the group agreed on the following core supervisory functions:

- Best practice dissemination
- Compliance monitoring
- Fiscal monitoring
- Integrated data systems and recordkeeping
- Interagency coordination
- Policy guidance and technical assistance
- Quality improvement
- Staffing standards and support
- Training

These functions are intentionally broad in scope. The specifics of how each function will be carried out (i.e., what type of training is provided, to whom, by whom, how often, etc.) can be tailored to fit each program and should be determined by personnel with expertise in that program. These functions, therefore, are intended to provide a framework through which responsibilities can be allocated between central, regional, and local entities to ensure that the full range of activities associated with the administration of social services programs can be properly supervised and supported.

The SSWG expects that DHHS will allocate resources differently between regions and over time as necessary to meet each region's particularized needs and challenges. In addition, the group expects that each regional office will employ all of these supervisory functions in every county within its region and will need to make strategic decisions about how resources are allocated within the region. When making these decisions, it is critical that the regional office provide support to all counties, regardless of population size, number of local staff, and service demands. For example, regional offices will need to allocate resources to meet the needs of both (1) an urban agency with a larger staff and higher service demands and (2) a rural agency with a smaller staff and fewer service demands.

Below are tables that both define each function set out in the bulleted list above and describe how the responsibilities within the function should be allocated across the three levels of government.

Table 1A. Best Practice Dissemination

Facilitate open lines of communication to share best practices across programs and local agencies.

General Description of Role	
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and select best practices that can be implemented statewide • Facilitate the implementation of best practices statewide through resource provision and guidance • Respond to feedback regarding best practices and make final determination regarding statewide applicability • Promote a culture of innovation that allows for improvement on practice models and strategies
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support local agencies in the implementation of best practices through training and resource provision • Assess innovative practice strategies developed by local agencies for region-wide or statewide applicability • Facilitate sharing of best practices at the regional and local levels when appropriate • Share information with central office regarding best practice implementation at the regional and local levels
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement best practices while assessing for areas that need improvement • Request support from and provide feedback to regional offices throughout implementation process • Share innovations and lessons learned with regional offices • Share best practices with other local agencies when appropriate

Table 1B. Compliance Monitoring

Evaluate compliance with applicable federal and state laws and policies and direct changes when necessary. Compliance monitoring includes the concept of *risk assessment*.

General Description of Role	
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish statewide plan for routine compliance monitoring • Provide tools that facilitate/support compliance monitoring and risk assessment • Oversee regional offices to ensure timely, coordinated, and consistent monitoring across regions • Make final determination regarding corrective action and state intervention in local administration
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform compliance monitoring as provided in statewide plan and in accordance with the written agreement required by G.S. 108A-74; coordinate scheduling of compliance monitoring activities across programs for local social services agencies ("local agencies") within the region • Work with local agencies to develop corrective action plans and oversee implementation of those plans • Support local agencies in their efforts to monitor compliance internally • Share, interpret, and discuss monitoring results and dashboard data with agency directors • Maintain open communication with local agencies and others in the county regarding compliance duties, challenges, and successes
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperate with monitoring activities performed by regional office • Work with regional office to develop and implement corrective action plans when appropriate

Table 1C. Fiscal Monitoring

Ensure that all financial resources are used effectively, efficiently, and in compliance with applicable federal and state laws (includes risk assessment).

General Description of Role	
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steward federal and state funds and manage reporting obligations • Establish statewide plan for routine fiscal monitoring • Oversee regional offices to ensure timely, coordinated, and consistent fiscal monitoring across regions • Make final determination regarding corrective action and state intervention in local administration
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform fiscal monitoring • Coordinate scheduling of fiscal monitoring activities across programs for local agencies across region • Support local offices in their efforts to effectively develop and manage their budgets internally • Maintain open communication with local agencies and others in the county regarding fiscal condition • Work with the local agencies to identify resource gaps or a need for re-basing at the local level; communicate those needs to the central office
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement internal control with the support of the regional offices • Develop and manage budgets with support from the regional offices • Identify resource gaps and provide feedback to the regional offices

Table 1D. Integrated Data Systems and Recordkeeping

Develop reliable, secure, and user-friendly data systems to support service delivery and recordkeeping. Maintain accurate, thorough, statewide records that are accessible for purposes of service provision, review, monitoring, or consultation. Examples include NC FAST and centralized registries.

General Description of Role	
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and maintain statewide, dependable, electronic, program-specific data systems to support service provision and recordkeeping • Ensure that systems comply with applicable federal and state laws • Provide regional offices and local agencies with regular reports that are timely and accurate • Support regional staff with effective data analytics • Provide training and technical support to regions and local agencies related to data systems and recordkeeping • Respond to feedback received from local agencies and regional offices regarding data systems • When data systems must be replaced or modified, coordinate and stage pilot projects and roll-outs on a regional basis
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical assistance to local agencies to support accurate data collection, proper recordkeeping, and timeliness • Gather feedback from local agencies as issues arise to recommend improvements and updates to data systems • Provide support for pilot counties involved with implementing changes to data systems
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement internal policies that support accurate data collection and proper recordkeeping that are consistent with state and federal law and policy • Request assistance from regional office when necessary to facilitate the effective use of data systems and analytics • When necessary to supplement the regular reports, request reports from regional office • Provide feedback to regional and/or central office regarding data systems

Table 1E. Interagency Coordination

Coordination of resources, including staff, when service delivery or support requires the involvement of more than one local social services agency.

	General Description of Role
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish policies to outline when and how interagency and inter-region coordination is required; examples include the management of conflict of interest (COI) cases and coordination of resource deployment in emergencies • Develop protocols for coordinating with state agencies other than DHHS, such as emergency management, and help manage efforts that involve other agencies • Assist with coordination efforts that involve multiple regions or are being implemented statewide • Establish system to track assets and staff available to be deployed or shared with other local agencies in emergencies
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support to a local agency that is in need of assistance from other agencies • If local agencies are not able to reach a resolution related to the provision of assistance or resource-sharing, make decisions as necessary to ensure that service needs are met; for example, this may involve (1) assigning COI cases to agencies consistent with state policy or (2) assigning responsibility for processing County A's economic services applications to County B if County A's information technology system is temporarily compromised and unavailable • Coordinate with other regions when additional resources or support are needed • Monitor local policies or plans related to coordination, such as emergency management plans and COI policies • Track assets and staff available to be deployed to other local agencies in emergencies
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop local policies or plans related to interagency coordination consistent with state policies and local needs • Identify situations when the local agency could benefit from assistance or resources from another agency • Reach out to other local agencies directly when possible and appropriate to request support; communicate with regional office about these county-initiated coordination efforts • Cooperate with other agencies that are seeking assistance • Develop relationships with other partners within the county (such as emergency management) and help marshal resources from those partners when necessary and appropriate to support other agencies

Table 1F. Policy Guidance and Technical Assistance

Promote consistent interpretation of state and federal law through development of clear and consistent statewide program policies. Provide clarification, additional explanation, or implementation support when necessary.

	General Description of Role
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and maintain statewide program policies that are consistent with state and federal law • Crosswalk policy with other departments (DAAS, DMA, DHSR, AOC, etc.) to ensure consistency • Provide support and guidance to regional offices in the implementation of statewide policy and the supervision of local agencies • Provide policy updates to regional offices in a timely manner to ensure consistency in implementation • Review and react to feedback from regional offices and local agencies; update policy accordingly
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide policy guidance and technical assistance that is both directed by regional/central office and requested by the local agency • Support local agencies in the consistent implementation of policy with training and technical assistance • Promote the consistent implementation and interpretation of policy between and within regions through policy expertise • Use data analytics and other sources of information to identify situations or challenges that may stem from inappropriate interpretation and application of law or policy and work with the local agency to evaluate and align practices when necessary • Maintain a proactive relationship with central office that increases timeliness and consistency of implementation • Receive and respond to feedback from local agencies about policy guidance • Provide feedback to central office regarding any disconnect between law, policy, and/or practice • If policy questions or concerns arise and are addressed at the local level, share relevant information across county or regional lines when appropriate
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement statewide policy • Develop and maintain internal policies that are consistent with state and federal policy • Request guidance and technical assistance from regional office when clarification is needed or issues arise • Provide feedback to regional office throughout the implementation process

Table 1G. Quality Improvement

Develop and implement systems for continuous quality improvement for programs and services.

General Description of Role	
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policies regarding continuous quality improvement (CQI) expectations • Provide tools that facilitate CQI activities • Utilize the statewide performance dashboard to develop CQI activities • Evaluate data from the statewide performance dashboard for trends and best practices relevant to statewide performance
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor quality of service delivery in local agencies using dashboard data and other available information sources • Provide training, technical assistance, and support to local agencies for CQI activities, such as assisting with the interpretation and use of available statewide data and CQI tools • Utilize regional and local performance dashboards (subsets of the statewide dashboard) to assist local agencies in developing CQI activities • Evaluate data relevant to regional and local performance dashboards for trends and best practices relevant to regional and agency-specific performance
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement CQI systems and practices • Utilize statewide, regional, and county-specific data to evaluate dashboard performance and develop CQI strategies to improve performance • Identify CQI best practices and share with regional staff

Table 1H. Staffing Standards and Support

Setting standards for social services staff, supporting those standards, and providing human resources support when appropriate.

General Description of Role	
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and maintain statewide minimum qualifications requirements for all central, regional, and local positions • Provide support, guidance, and oversight in unresolved human resource (HR) conflicts • Identify workforce gaps and possible solutions • Recruit and retain high-quality staff at the central and regional levels
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in development and revision of minimum qualifications requirements to ensure that they adequately account for local needs and challenges • Monitor local agencies for compliance with minimum qualifications requirements • Provide HR expertise to local agencies upon request • Provide feedback to directors and supervisory staff at the local level regarding staff performance based on data analytics, monitoring, and other interactions • Recruit and retain high-quality staff at the regional level
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement internal HR policies that are consistent with federal, state, and local law and policy • Cooperate with any monitoring activities performed by regional staff regarding HR and minimum qualifications requirements • Request guidance from regional offices when policy clarification is needed • Regularly evaluate staff performance and make adjustments as necessary • Recruit and retain high-quality staff at the local level

Table 11. Training

Ensure that personnel involved in the provision of services are competent and well-prepared to discharge duties associated with their positions.

General Description of Role	
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and maintain statewide curriculum and training standards • Establish and maintain “train the trainer” curriculum and support for regional staff • Ensure consistent training across regions • Ensure that training is timely, accessible, and able to accommodate all regional and local staff
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide “train the trainer” curriculum and support to directors and supervisory-level staff at the local level • Provide training related to root-cause analysis and budgeting • Provide training to local staff directly when appropriate • Maintain a “bank” of training resources accessible to local agencies • Monitor compliance with training mandates at the local level to ensure competency and consistency • Identify training needs within the region using data analytics and respond accordingly
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and maintain internal training policy that is consistent with state and federal policy • Document training and cooperate with any monitoring activities performed by regional offices • Use internal assessments to identify training needs and respond accordingly • Request guidance and support in the training of local staff and community partners when necessary

“We can develop the best blueprint, but if we don’t have the people to carry it out, we won’t succeed.”

—Glenn Osborne, Wilson County DSS Director

C. What Types of Staff and Support Should Be Available through the Regional Offices?

Once the SSWG decided on what type of work the regional offices should be doing (functions), the group discussed general ideas for how the offices should be staffed to do that work. The group agreed on several key principles about staffing:

- **Regions must have high-quality, experienced, and reliable staff.** The SSWG heard from many stakeholders about this issue and concluded that this is the highest-priority issue with regard to regional offices and staffing.
- **Regions should serve all social services programs.** For example, there should not be a different regional office or regional designation for Medicaid or adult services than for other social services programs. The goal is to consolidate and coordinate regional activity that supports programs and services administered by local social services agencies.
- **Resource allocation will vary from region to region.** Some regions will need more support for adult services and others may need more support for food and nutrition services. Some resource-allocation decisions may be long-term (assigning permanent staff to a region), while others may be short-term (shifting staff from central office or one region temporarily). This flexibility in allocating resources will allow DHHS to respond to unique, emerging, or emergency needs.
- **Some staff positions currently in the central office will shift to regional offices.** In addition, DHHS staff members who are located outside of Raleigh may be reassigned to different regions once the new system is established.¹³ The SSWG expects that DHHS will work with the outside organization assisting with system reform to determine the appropriate staffing for both the central and regional offices. The group recommends that DHHS have in place enough high-quality staff at both levels to carry out the supervisory functions identified in Section III.B. If DHHS develops a staffing plan, compares that to the current staff and positions that are available, and determines that additional positions are needed to support this new system, DHHS may need to ask the legislature for additional funding.

The SSWG discussed several different visions for staffing the regional offices. They ranged from lean to robust. As discussed above, the number of staff will vary from region to region, but the general staffing model proposed is reflected in Table 2.

13. See UNC School of Government, *Summary Table of DHHS Staff Involved with Supervising County DSS Programs*, <https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/DHHS%20Workforce%20HAND-OUT.pdf>. Staff and/or positions should be reassigned to meet staffing needs in the regional offices based on the knowledge, skills, and experience needed for given positions. Individuals should not be reassigned based on geographical convenience.

Table 2. Proposed Staffing Model

Position	Description
Regional Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as liaison between assigned counties and central office staff • Monitor counties in region to identify areas of concern • Facilitate central office supervision of counties within region, which may include activities such as coordinating monitoring visits, scheduling needed training for county directors or staff, or providing local support for state oversight of a corrective action plan
Administrative Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office support • Human resources (HR) support • Other duties as assigned
General Technical Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff with expertise to provide support and training in generalized fields, such as HR, budget, and information technology • Depending on needs and resources, staff may be assigned to a region or may rotate between regions
Program Consultants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff with program-specific knowledge (e.g., child welfare, adult services, Medicaid, food and nutrition, child support) • Each region would have some program consultants assigned to the region, but the mix and number would vary from region to region • Regions may permanently share a program consultant in some instances • Regions may temporarily share program consultants with another region to assist when there is a vacancy or an intensive need for support in the other region • If a region does not have a program consultant for a program, central and regional directors would have flexibility to provide program consultant support from the central office or to make other arrangements as appropriate to ensure that local social services agencies have access to adequate support and supervision

D. What Factors Should Guide Policymakers When Dividing the State into Supervisory Regions?

The SSWG agreed on several key factors that should guide policymakers when dividing the state into supervisory regions:

1. **No county should be split** into different regions.
2. Regions should include **contiguous** counties.
3. **Judicial districts** should not be disrupted. This factor became a priority because of the high volume of child welfare work that counties conduct in district court. Adult protective services cases are also heard in district court, although the volume of cases is not as high. In order for regional offices to provide locally-responsive support to the counties in these cases, they should be familiar with the local rules and practices in each judicial district as well as understand issues related to venue and jurisdiction as applied to each judicial district within the region.

4. Regions should be comparable in the size of the **total population** as well as the **population served** by the social services programs.
5. Regions should be comparable in **geographic size**. Because regional staff will spend a significant amount of time traveling between counties, it would be unreasonable to assign staff in one region a significantly larger geographic area than staff in another region.
6. Regions should strive to preserve **natural networks** that have developed over time. Many counties work together to provide services. For example, counties may share staff or trade cases when one county has a conflict of interest. The SSWG believes that the regional offices should support and cultivate effective relationships and networks. The SSWG surveyed the county directors to identify existing relationships and used that data as the foundation for developing the supervisory region maps. (See Appendix D for a description of the survey.¹⁴)

The SSWG believes that service providers' relationships with other, external partners and programs, such as the Councils of Government and the Local Management Entities (LMEs), are essential to service provision. Many of these partners operate on a regional basis. The working group considered trying to align with regional partnerships that exist for one or more programs (adult services, mental health, child welfare contracts) but concluded that (1) there is no consistent set of partnership boundaries across all of the programs and (2) the other factors identified above were a higher priority than alignment with any single program's partnerships. It is impossible to satisfy all of the high-priority factors identified above and also align with the various service provision regions.

The SSWG recognizes that some important elements that contribute to supervisory region mapping may be changing in the near future.

- The legislature has been discussing revisions to the state's judicial districts.
- The Medicaid system is in the midst of transitioning to a managed care model.
- The LME/MCO regions change occasionally and may also evolve in connection with the Medicaid transition.

Because these elements of the system are in flux, the SSWG decided not to recommend a single map of supervisory regions for 2020. The group thought it would be more useful to recommend the factors, outlined above, that should be considered when DHHS or the legislature develops the final regional map. As discussed above, the SSWG recommendations will be evaluated by DHHS, and the agency will send a proposed plan to the legislature in the fall of 2018. The legislature will then have the opportunity to consider legislation to implement the new system. The SSWG recommends that DHHS and the legislature take into consideration the priorities identified by the SSWG when developing the final maps.

E. What Are Some Examples of Regions That Are Consistent with These Factors?

The SSWG recommends that the state have five to seven supervisory regions. The group developed two maps (see Appendix C) that are intended to reflect careful consideration of the factors described above. Both maps satisfy the first three factors (whole counties, contiguous counties, and judicial district alignment). For the last three factors (population, geographic size, and natural

14. Survey data is available via the "Materials" linked heading under the main "Social Services Working Group" heading on the UNC School of Government's microsite at www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials.

networks), the SSWG tried to strike a balance. For example, a region that has a larger population may encompass a smaller geographic area, while a region with a larger geographic area may have a smaller population. Both maps attempt to preserve as many natural networks as possible. The SSWG posted these two maps online¹⁵ and solicited public comment. All comments received are available online.¹⁶

Listed below are some of the differences between the two maps.

- **Number of regions.** One map has five regions and the other has seven. The SSWG also discussed a map version that had six regions. The majority of public commenters preferred seven regions because they inferred that smaller regions would result in more intensive support for each local agency. While the SSWG agrees that smaller regions may be able to provide better, more individualized support, the group has serious concerns about the availability of staff to do the work that will be required. The SSWG considered the possibility that the state could begin with fewer regions (five or six) and grow the number over time once the systems are in place and high-quality staff are available.
- **Size of regions.** The SSWG has some concerns about staff travel time if the regions are too large. If DHHS concludes that larger regions are necessary, the SSWG encourages a plan that divides the regions into districts or zones to enable county-specific specialization for staff.
- **Military communities.** The SSWG recommends concentrating expertise in serving military communities in one or possibly two regions. When developing the final regional supervision map, DHHS or the legislature should consider clustering the following counties to the extent possible: Cumberland, Moore, Onslow, Harnett, Hoke, Craven, and Brunswick. The five-region map clusters these counties into two regions, while the seven-region map breaks them into four regions.
- **American Indian communities.** The SSWG recommends that DHHS or the legislature create a final regional supervision map that does not separate large American Indian communities across regions. This will allow the regional office staff to develop some expertise in working with the families and coordinating with the tribal organizations when necessary. For example, there is a strong community from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in Cherokee, Graham, Clay, Macon, Swain, Jackson, and Haywood counties. The Lumbee tribe has a strong community in Robeson county and also in Hoke, Cumberland, and Scotland counties. Both of the proposed maps keep the western counties together, but unfortunately, both maps disrupt the county network surrounding Robeson county.¹⁷

15. See the “Notices” page of the UNC School of Government’s Social Services microsite: <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/notices>.

16. See the “Public Comments” page of the UNC School of Government’s Social Services microsite: <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/public-comments>.

17. The five-region map keeps Robeson together with Hoke and Scotland counties. The seven-region map keeps Robeson together with Cumberland.

IV. Opportunities for Involvement of Local Elected Officials

As mentioned in Section I, the legislation directed the SSWG to identify “[o]ptions for authorizing the board of county commissioners to intervene in urgent situations to assume direct control of the department of social services at the local level prior to the State assuming direct control of service delivery”¹⁸

In evaluating how best to approach this particular issue, the SSWG elected to consider a wide range of options for involving local elected officials in the social services system rather than focusing exclusively on options for assuming direct control in urgent situations. This broader scope was necessary because the SSWG does not consider it practical to insert local elected officials into the situation after a crisis or challenge has escalated. It was believed to be more practical to determine whether and how local elected officials could be involved earlier in the process to help the agency prevent a crisis or challenge.

To this end, the SSWG considered options for involvement from the time the social services agency is formed up until the point when the state is preparing to temporarily assume responsibility for local program administration. Below is an overview of that discussion and the options identified. Each option is color-coded as follows:

GREEN = the option for involvement currently may be exercised voluntarily and without legislation, but legislation would be required to mandate it statewide

RED = the option may only be exercised if legislation is adopted

Figure 2 presents all of this information in a linear fashion.

A. Agency Formation

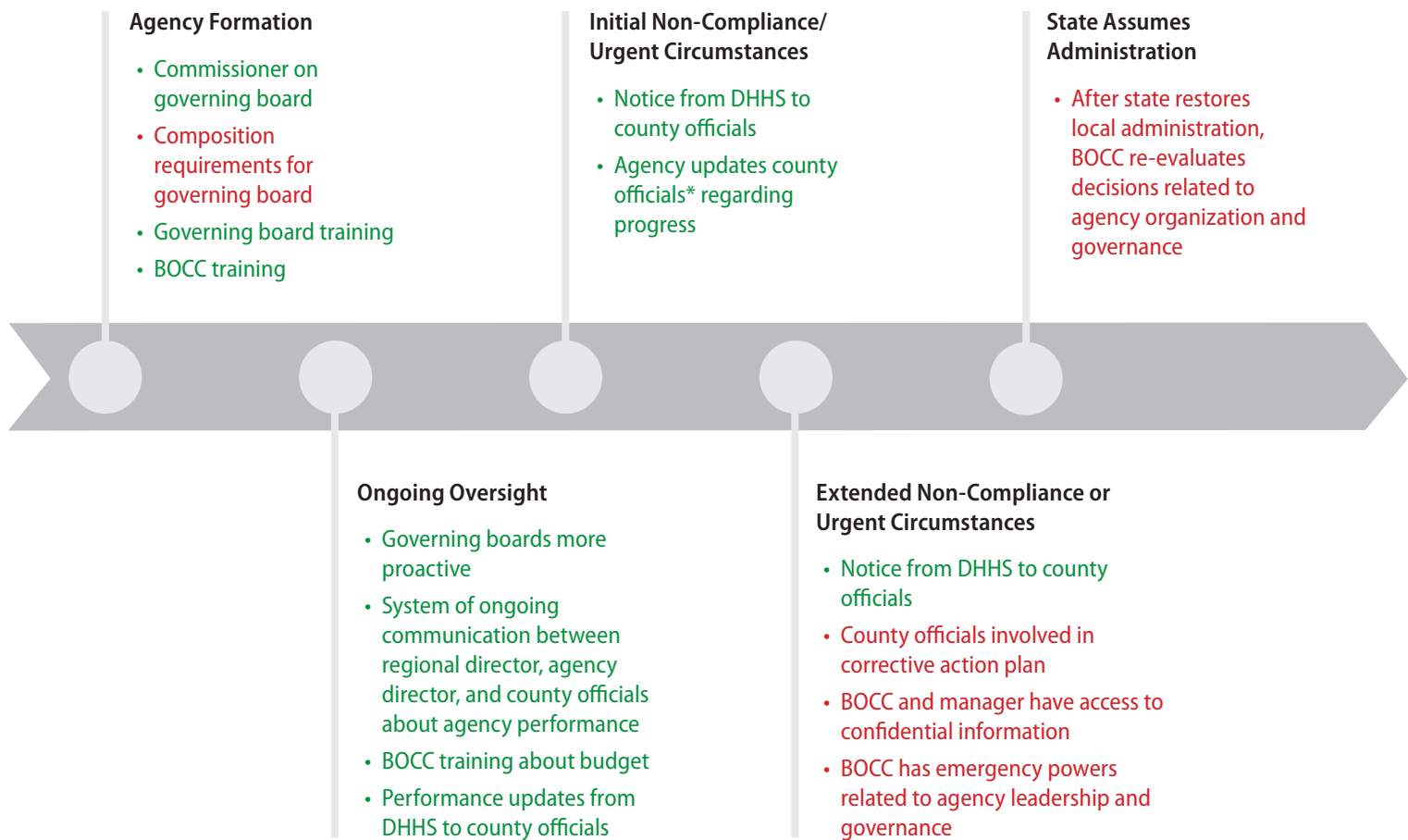
The board of county commissioners has the exclusive authority to make decisions about the organization and governance of the social services agency that serves the county. The board may make changes as long as it follows certain statutorily-defined procedures. With respect to the organization that delivers social services within the county, the commissioners may choose

- a county social services department,
- a consolidated human services agency that includes social services and other human services programs, or
- a regional social services department (after March 2019).

With respect to the governing board, even more options are available. For single-county agencies, the board of commissioners may serve as the agency governing board or the board may choose to have an appointed county social services board or an appointed consolidated human services board.¹⁹ For regional departments, the governing board will be an appointed board, as provided in statute. County commissioners have varying levels of involvement in appointing members to such boards. For a county social services board, the commissioners appoint two of

18. S.L. 2017-41, § 1.2.(d)(1)e.

19. For more information about the options for agency organization and governance, see the UNC School of Government’s North Carolina Public Health Law microsite: www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/north-carolina-public-health-law/consolidated-human-services-agencies-chsas; see also the following presentation: Aimee N. Wall, Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (UNC School of Government, 2/8/18), <https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/Presentations%202.8.2018%20v3.pdf>.

Figure 2. Local Agency Timeline

*The term “county officials” refers to the board of county commissioners, the county manager, and the agency governing board (if different than board of county commissioners).

Color codes:

GREEN = option currently may be exercised voluntarily without legislation, but legislation would be required to mandate it statewide

RED = may only be exercised if legislation is adopted

five members (or one of three members). For a consolidated human services board, the commissioners appoint all of the members and a commissioner is required to serve on the board. For a regional board, they appoint some of the members and a commissioner may be appointed to serve on the board.

Below are options for increased involvement at this stage identified by the SSWG. These options would establish new structural expectations for the local system.

- A county commissioner serves on the governing board.
- Require social services board members to have certain categories of expertise and/or experience.
- Require training for members of a social services governing board on the board's powers and duties.
- Educate boards of county commissioners on the authority and role of social services agencies and governing boards.

B. Ongoing Oversight

Boards of county commissioners are responsible for the budget of the agency providing social services in the county. In some counties, commissioners also receive regular updates about the work of the agency. In the twenty-one counties where the board of county commissioners serves as the agency's governing board, the commissioners are required to meet monthly to receive information, advise the agency director, and carry out other duties of the governing board.

Below are options for increased involvement at this stage identified by the SSWG. These options identify shared but distinct responsibilities at all levels.

- Social services boards take a more proactive role in agency oversight and budget development, holding the director accountable for agency results.
- Create a system of ongoing communication between the state regional director, the local agency director, the county manager, the governing board, and the board of county commissioners about the performance of the agency to foster strong, positive, and supportive relationships outside of challenging or crisis situations.
- Educate boards of county commissioners about the county's social services budget.
- DHHS, through the regional office, provides regular updates to the governing board and the board of county commissioners about the agency's performance.

C. Initial Non-Compliance/Urgent Circumstances

As discussed above, counties will enter into an annual written agreement with the state that integrates performance requirements. If those requirements are not met or if the local social services agency is not in compliance with applicable laws, the local agency must address the cause of the problem. The supervisory functions tables above reflect the SSWG's vision that the regional offices will have an ongoing role in helping local agencies monitor and improve quality and identify the root cause of problems or challenges facing an agency. DHHS may, for example, work with an agency to develop a performance improvement plan. The timelines and standards for this type of plan would not be as rigid as those for a corrective action plan.

Below are options for increased involvement at this stage identified by the SSWG.

- The board of county commissioners, the governing board, and the county manager receive prompt notice from DHHS that there are compliance concerns with the agency. This notice would constitute a “yellow” warning flag.
- The agency shares updates with the county manager and the board of county commissioners about progress in resolving the problem or addressing the challenge.

D. Extended Non-Compliance or Urgent Circumstances

If a local agency is out of compliance with the agreement or the law for an extended period,²⁰ or if an urgent circumstance arises, the law requires that DHHS and the agency enter into a joint corrective action plan. The initial plan may last for up to twelve months and DHHS may extend the period for an additional six months.²¹

Below are options for increased involvement at this stage identified by the SSWG.

- The board of county commissioners, the governing board, and the county manager receive prompt notice from DHHS that the agency is required to enter into a corrective action plan. This notice would constitute a “red” warning flag.
- Involve the board of county commissioners, the governing board, and the county manager in developing the joint corrective action plan and in oversight of its implementation.
- If the board of county commissioners is *not* the governing board, provide the board with access to confidential information in the same manner as the governing board has pursuant to G.S. 108A-11.
- Provide the board of county commissioners with the authority to exercise emergency powers to make immediate changes in agency leadership and governance.
 - If the board of county commissioners is not the governing board, provide it with authority to work with the governing board to discipline or discharge the agency director if necessary or to install temporary agency leadership.
 - If the board of county commissioners is not the governing board, provide it with the authority to abolish the governing board and assume the board’s powers and duties immediately. This action is currently possible and requires a public hearing after thirty days advance notice.²²

E. State Assumes Administration

If the agency fails to complete the corrective action plan, DHHS, through the regional office, is required to temporarily assume administrative responsibility for the social services program that is at issue. Once DHHS concludes that it is necessary to take this step, it must provide thirty days advance notice to the board of county commissioners, the county manager, the governing board, and the agency director. Once DHHS has assumed responsibility for administration, it must inform these same stakeholders about “key activities and ongoing concerns.”

20. Defined as three consecutive months or five months out of twelve consecutive months. S.L. 2017-41, § 3.2.(a).

21. *Id.*

22. G.S. 153A-77(a).

Once DHHS decides to restore administrative responsibility to the local agency, it must provide notice again to the same group of stakeholders.²³

The SSWG did not identify any options for increased involvement at this stage. **It did discuss the possibility of requiring the board of county commissioners to re-evaluate its current structure related to agency organization and governance after the state has restored administrative responsibility to the agency.** The purpose would be to force the elected officials to make an affirmative decision to either change the governance structure or keep it the same after a crisis has been resolved.

V. Additional Recommendations

In the course of discussing the questions above, the SSWG arrived at several related conclusions and recommendations.

A. Consistency Across Regions

The primary shortcoming of North Carolina's previous regional system was the lack of consistency across regions. As mentioned above, many people involved with the previous system described the independence developed by the regional directors over time and the variations in practice and policy interpretations that developed as a result. The SSWG recommends that the new regional system have sufficient safeguards to prevent that type of independence and variation, without discouraging innovative problem-solving or flexibility in administrative design based on local characteristics.

Research on regional systems from other states indicates that this problem is common. Georgia has recently added a layer of supervision at a mega-region level referred to as "districts." In other words, the state is now divided into three districts, and each district includes multiple regions. The three district directors are responsible for keeping the regions within the district and across districts aligned.²⁴ The SSWG was not immediately interested in this approach because it would create another administrative layer to navigate in an already complex system. Georgia's district system has, however, developed some interesting strategies for increasing connections across the region and promoting consistency, such as coordinated resource-sharing and collaborative projects. **The SSWG recommends that DHHS consult with other states to identify best practices for developing a regional culture of shared responsibility.**

Virginia also experienced similar challenges with consistency in their five-region system. As a result, the state has recently adopted an approach that it hopes will improve consistency and coordination. Virginia created a position at the central office level that is responsible for supervising and coordinating the work of regional directors.²⁵ Because the regional offices will be responsible for oversight of so many different programs, the risk of fragmentation in supervision and policy implementation is extremely high. Having a central supervisory contact would be important to developing a systematic and consistent approach across regions. **The SSWG recommends that DHHS include a similar position in the agency's proposal to the legislature.**

23. S.L. 2017-41, § 3.2.(a).

24. See *Supervision of Local Child Welfare Administration*, a Georgia fact sheet, on the UNC School of Government's website: https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/Georgia_0.pdf.

25. See *Regional Supervision of Local Social Services Administration*, a Virginia fact sheet, on the UNC School of Government's website: <https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/Virginia.pdf>.

Another potential approach for improving consistency across regions is drawn from North Carolina's own experience with regional staff. At one point in the history of the state's regional offices, there was a deliberate decision made to have separate lines of accountability for program consultants. The consultants would report to the central office staff for issues related to policy interpretation and clarification and would report to the head of the regional office for administrative coordination and oversight. **The SSWG encourages DHHS to consider adopting this type of dual-accountability (policy guidance vs. administrative oversight) in order to promote consistency across regions.** In doing so, it will be extremely important to develop clear lines of responsibility to ensure that regional, county, and central office staff understand who has authority to provide direction. Without such clarity, there is a significant risk of confusion and inconsistency for staff at all three levels.

B. Accountability of Regional Offices

The legislation establishing the SSWG directs the group to recommend "[m]ethods for holding the regional offices accountable for performance and responsiveness."²⁶ In discussing this concept, it became clear that the regional system recommendations developed by the SSWG already have built-in methods for holding the offices accountable. Specifically, the report includes the following:

- The SSWG recommends that there be a single person in the central office who is responsible for general oversight of regions and supervision of regional directors. (See Section V.A, above.) It will be the duty of this person, in conjunction with others in the central office, to monitor and measure performance by the regions and to make changes as necessary to ensure that the system is meeting the needs of the people it serves and the counties administering the programs.
- The supervisory functions identified with the regional offices are a type of "job description" for the regional office as a whole. (See Section III.B, above.) Taken together, they provide a clear roadmap for the central office and others to evaluate the performance of each office.
- The SSWG expects that the data dashboard, which is being created by the outside organization, will be used by the central office to measure regional performance as well as county performance. (See Section I, above.)

In addition to these existing components, **the SSWG recommends that DHHS establish a formal mechanism to allow local social services directors and county managers to provide direct feedback to central office staff on the performance of the regional office and the regional director.** Integrating information from local partners is essential to creating a high-functioning system in which all three levels are valued and held accountable.

C. Physical Space for Regional Offices

The SSWG expects that DHHS's plan will recommend physical office space for each region. In developing those recommendations, **the SSWG encourages DHHS to identify opportunities to share space with existing agency facilities, such as Vocational Rehabilitation offices, or with partners within the region, such as counties, community colleges, or Councils of Government.** Given the supervisory functions described above, the SSWG anticipates that minimal office space will be required. It recommends that, **at a minimum, each regional office have permanent space for the regional director and administrative staff.** Because program consultants are

26. S.L. 2017-41, § 1.2.(d)(1)c.

expected to spend most of their time in county offices providing support, it may be most appropriate for those **regional staff be home-based with the option of using flex space in regional offices periodically**. Regional offices will also need to have capacity to host meetings and training events. When possible, the SSWG recommends that regional offices coordinate with other partners and existing spaces to meet those types of needs.

D. Study Different Models of Organization and Governance

During the SSWG's discussions related to local governance and oversight of social services agencies, it became clear that the landscape for the local social services agency structure has evolved dramatically in the last five to six years. This is the result of legislation enacted in 2012 that authorized counties to make significant changes in the way that social services and other human services agencies are organized and governed.²⁷ Looking ahead, this landscape may evolve even more as counties consider joining together to create regional departments. **The SSWG recommends that DHHS or the legislature evaluate the models of local agency organization and governance to compare performance and identify best practices moving forward.**

E. Study Supervision of Legal Representation

Each county social services agency has legal representation for both administrative and program responsibilities. Each county meets these needs differently. Some have staff attorneys who are part of the agency staff, some rely on attorneys in the county attorney's office, some contract with private attorneys, and many use a combination of these three models. With respect to representation related to programs, especially child welfare and adult services, there is some concern about consistency of practice and interpretation across counties. The SSWG did not focus on this issue during Stage One but may explore it further in Stage Two in the context of improving coordination between counties. **The SSWG recommends that DHHS and the legislature also study this issue further. It is possible that changes to state supervision of legal representation could improve services to the public, increase support for the counties, maximize federal funding through consistent and accurate court order language, and avoid liability for the state under agency theory.**

F. Connection with System Reform Efforts

At several points during the SSWG's process, the group "flagged" issues that required attention from others involved with social services system reform but were of ongoing interest to the SSWG. The specific issues are:

- **Staffing.** At several points throughout the process, SSWG members expressed concern about the number, quality, and training of staff available to meet the needs of the state's social services system. In order for a regional system of supervision to be successful, it is essential that the appropriate staff are available and prepared to do the work. The SSWG acknowledged that staffing studies and workforce development strategies are outside the scope of its charge. The group anticipates that the outside organization hired to assist with

27. See the presentation cited *supra* note 18; see also Aimee N. Wall et al., *Comparing North Carolina's Local Public Health Agencies: The Legal Landscape, the Perspectives, and the Numbers, Final Report* (UNC School of Government, May 2013), <https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/reports/Comparing%20Public%20Health%20Agencies%20FINAL%20May%202013.pdf>.

system reform will closely examine this issue and offer recommendations to DHHS and the state related to this concern. The SSWG also expects that the outside organization will work with DHHS to consider staffing needs for regional offices, with particular attention being paid to determining how many positions from the central office should be reallocated to regional offices.

- **Child fatality oversight.** The SSWG recognizes that one aspect of state supervision of social services involves careful evaluation of child fatalities, particularly those involving the child welfare system. North Carolina's current system is complex, with both state and local components. The SSWG noted that the outside organization hired to assist with system reform is *specifically* charged with reviewing the child fatality review system and making recommendations for change.²⁸ The SSWG believes that regional offices may be able to play an important role in these reviews and should be integrated into the reform recommendations offered by the outside organization.
- **Medicaid Transformation.** The SSWG recognizes that the Medicaid system is in a time of tremendous transition. The SSWG's charge was to consider how the regional system of supervision could better support county administration in all programs, including Medicaid. The group had some general discussions about the transition that is underway. Because the role of counties in administration of the new system is uncertain, it is not clear what the role of a regional office may be in supervising local administration. Therefore, the SSWG defers making any concrete recommendations related to Medicaid. Rather, the SSWG recommends that the revised Medicaid system (1) have a regional supervisory presence and (2) use the same set of regions as the rest of the social services system.

The SSWG will continue to monitor these issues and, as required by the legislation,²⁹ coordinate with the outside organization, as appropriate, during the course of its work.

G. Ongoing System Oversight

North Carolina's social services system is rapidly changing. The SSWG is concerned about the possibility that if some of the reforms are not successful, the state could experience avoidable system failures or challenges. The SSWG would like the state to have a mechanism in place to monitor system change and implementation throughout the process in order to identify challenges as early as possible and help the state correct its course. This could include revisiting the regional boundaries periodically and making changes to the supervisory functions and expectations. To this end, **the SSWG recommends that DHHS and the legislature consider assigning to the SSWG the responsibility for ongoing oversight of the system to ensure that the reforms are on path to achieving stated objectives.** In this role, the SSWG should have the authority to make recommendations to the state agency, the counties, and the legislature.

28. S.L. 2017-41, §2.1.(b)(3).

29. *Id.* § 2.1.(c)(2).

VI. Next Steps

As discussed in Section I, above, Stage Two of the SSWG's work will build on some of the concepts discussed in the first stage to develop recommendations regarding improved collaboration between counties and a general vision for transitioning from a county-administered social services system to a regionally-administered system. As with Stage One, the scope for Stage Two is broad and will encompass all social services programs. The SSWG tentatively plans to begin Stage Two meetings in early May, with the Stage Two report being due February 1, 2019.

Appendix A. Summary of Legislation

S.L. 2017-41 (H 630), as amended by S.L. 2017-102 (H 229)

Rylan's Law/Family and Child Protection and Accountability Act

This session law is expansive in scope and addresses many different social services topics. Each topic is addressed separately below.

Part I. Regional Supervision and Collaboration

This part focuses primarily on the need to (1) enhance state supervision of the administration of social services programs by the counties and (2) improve collaboration between counties. The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is required to submit a plan for establishing regional offices to the General Assembly by November 15, 2018, with the expectation that the system of regional supervision will be operational by March 1, 2020.

In developing the plan, DHHS must take into consideration recommendations from the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (hereinafter Working Group). The Working Group will have eighteen members representing different groups and stakeholders, including legislators, DHHS personnel, members of the judiciary, county commissioners, social services directors, and social services attorneys. There will be two co-chairs, one from the Senate and one from the House of Representatives. The UNC School of Government is required to convene the Working Group, facilitate the meetings, and provide administrative and technical support to the effort. The co-chairs are authorized to establish ad hoc subcommittees to gather information from various experts and stakeholder organizations.

The Working Group is required to prepare two reports. The first is due by April 15, 2018, and must include recommendations regarding

- the size, number, and location of the regional state offices;
- the allocation of responsibility between central/Raleigh, regional, and local/county officials in supervising and administering social services programs;
- methods for holding the regional offices accountable for performance and responsiveness;
- information-sharing between the regional offices and the boards of county commissioners regarding local department performance;
- options for authorizing the board of county commissioners to intervene in program administration prior to the state assuming direct control of service delivery.

The second report is due by February 1, 2019, and must include

- recommendations regarding legislative and regulatory changes necessary to improve collaboration between counties that specifically address information-sharing, conflicts of interest, and inter-county movement of clients;
- a vision for transitioning the state from a county-administered system to a regionally-administered system.

It is important to note that earlier versions of the legislation would have required the state to implement a regionally-administered social services system. The version of the law that was adopted requires regional *supervision* and directs the Working Group to consider the issue of regional *administration*.

Part II. Reforming State Supervision and Accountability

This part directs the Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM), in consultation with DHHS, to contract with an outside organization (contractor) to develop a plan to reform the state supervision and accountability for the social services system. It identifies two components of the plan: system reform and child welfare reform. These components are described in more detail below. The contractor is required to submit a preliminary report to the General Assembly 180 days after the contract is finalized. After that report, the contractor must submit bimonthly progress reports. DHHS is required to submit preliminary recommendations for legislative change by October 1, 2018, and may submit supplemental recommendations as necessary.

System Reform Plan

The contractor will be required to evaluate the role of the state; develop a new vision and strategic direction for the social services system; and develop a plan for reforming the overall system to improve outcomes, supervision, and accountability. It must also develop a plan related to data collection and use and create a dashboard using data from the NC FAST system. The purpose of the dashboard is to serve as a report card for the public to see how the local departments are performing. The contractor is also required to develop a plan for continuous quality improvement (CQI).

In the context of the system reform plan, the contractor will be required to review policies and procedures to identify changes necessary to support reform. It will also need to provide ongoing evaluation and oversight of DHHS's implementation of system reform.

Child Welfare Reform Plan

As part of the system reform plan, the contractor is also required to develop a specific plan focused on child welfare reform. The plan must include recommendations regarding child protective services; preventive and in-home services; child fatality oversight; placement, permanency, health, mental health, and educational services for children and families; services for older youth and those who have aged out; and staff training and compensation. It must also address a long list of specific practice-related issues.

Part III. County Contract/Corrective Action/State Intervention

This part amends G.S. 108A-74, which is a statute that authorizes the state to intervene in county child welfare programs in certain circumstances. The amendments expand the scope of the statute beyond child welfare and also provide additional mechanisms for oversight and intervention.

Initial Contracts (Fiscal Year (FY) 2018–19 and FY 2019–20)

Beginning next fiscal year (2018–19), counties will need to enter into a contract with the state that specifies (1) performance requirements and (2) administrative responsibilities. The contract will govern all social services programs other than medical assistance, which will include child welfare, adult protective services, public assistance, and child support enforcement. DHHS may develop a standardized contract for all 100 counties or it may develop contracts that are more tailored to the needs of individual counties.

The law does not include many details about the substance of the contract, but it does list certain requirements.

- When possible, the performance requirements must be “based upon standardized metrics utilizing reliable data.”
- The administrative responsibilities must address, at a minimum, staff training, data submission, and communication with DHHS.

The agreement may also authorize DHHS to withhold state or federal funds in the event of noncompliance.

Contracts Beginning FY 2020–21

Beginning in FY 2020–21, there are some changes to the contract specifications and the consequences for noncompliance.

- The details described above are unchanged except that the performance requirements required in the contract must be based on data in the dashboard developed by the contractor (see Part II, above) and other reliable data.
- If a department fails to comply with the contract or applicable law for three consecutive months or for five months within any consecutive twelve-month period, DHHS and the department must enter into a corrective action plan.
- If the department fails to complete the corrective action plan, DHHS must direct the regional office to temporarily assume responsibility for all or part of the administration of the department's social services. Prior to doing so, DHHS must provide thirty days' notice to the board of county commissioners, department, county manager, and board of social services.
- Once DHHS determines that the department is able to meet performance requirements, it must restore administrative responsibilities to the department. Prior to doing so, it must provide notice to county officials.

DHHS is required to submit various reports over time to the General Assembly regarding the contracts and corrective action.

Part IV. Regional Social Services Departments

As mentioned above, earlier versions of the legislation would have required a new system of regional social services departments. The version that was enacted directs the Working Group to broadly consider the idea of regionalization and also authorizes counties to create regional departments on their own initiative beginning in March 2019. Some highlights about regional departments are presented below.

- Regional departments may provide the full array of social services or limit the scope to one or more selected programs or services. For example, a group of counties could decide to create a regional department that focuses only on child support enforcement.
- Regional departments will be public authorities, which means they will be separate legal entities from the county. They will have independent authority related to budgeting, contracting, personnel, etc.
- Boards of county commissioners, together with the social services governing board, will have the authority to decide whether to create or join a regional department. The board or boards of county commissioners will have the exclusive authority to decide whether to withdraw from or dissolve a regional department. Withdrawals and dissolutions may be effective only at the end of a fiscal year.
- Regional departments must maintain a physical presence in each county.
- Participating counties are required to contribute financially to the regional department. The Social Services Commission is required to adopt rules governing financial contributions.

- Each regional department will have a governing board appointed by a combination of county commissioners, the Social Services Commission, and the sitting members.
- Each regional department will have a director who has the same powers and duties as a county social services director, as well as the authority to enter into contracts.

The session law included several conforming amendments to other statutes to accommodate the concept of a multi-county social services agency. One of the most significant changes was to G.S. 7B-400(a) (a provision in the state Juvenile Code addressing venue), which was amended to provide that

- (1) a proceeding alleging abuse, neglect, or dependency of a juvenile may be commenced in the judicial district where the juvenile resides or is present *at the time the juvenile petition is filed* and
- (2) if a regional department includes more than one judicial district, the department must file the petition in the district where the child resides or was present *when the underlying report of suspected abuse, neglect, or dependency was received*.

Like the other provisions in this part, this amendment is effective March 1, 2019.

Part V. Child Well-Being Transformation Council

Effective immediately, the state is required under this part to establish a new seventeen-member Child Well-Being Transformation Council that must focus on improving coordination, collaboration, and communication among agencies and organizations that provide public services to children. Membership of the group is prescribed in the law and includes representatives from different public and private stakeholders. The Legislative Services Commission will be responsible for staffing the Council.

The Council is required to focus initially on

- identifying the relevant child-serving agencies and organizations;
- identifying problems with coordination, collaboration, and communication in child welfare; and
- researching the role of entities like the Council in other states.

After March 1, 2020, the Council is charged with monitoring the reforms that will be underway; identifying gaps in coordination, collaboration, and communication; and recommending changes necessary to remedy the gaps.

Part VI. Driver's License Pilot Project

Part VI became effective July 1, 2017, and requires DHHS to establish a two-year pilot program that reimburses, on a first-come, first-served basis, youth and caregiver costs associated with the youth in care obtaining a driver's license. Expenses include driver's education, driver's license fees, and automobile insurance. The Division of Social Services must report on the pilot program to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services by March 1, 2018.

Part VII. Pilot Waiver for IAFT Foster Parents

DHHS is required under Part VII to establish a pilot program that waives the work requirement for foster parents of children who require Intensive Alternative Family Treatment (IAFT) in an effort to reduce placement disruptions for these children with high special needs. Participating

LMEs/MCOs must submit a report of required measured outcomes to the Division of Social Services, comparing whether there is improved placement stability and compliance with threshold target measures for treatment goal achievement and the use of higher-level hospital beds. The Division of Social Services must submit a report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services by December 1, 2018.

Part VIII. Termination of Parental Rights/Appeals

Part VIII amends G.S. 7B-1001 and S.L. 2017-7. These changes are effective for appeals filed on or after January 1, 2019. G.S. 7B-1001(a1) is a new subsection that allows an appeal of the following final orders to be made directly to the North Carolina Supreme Court:

- an order granting or denying a termination of parental rights (TPR) and
- a G.S. 7B-906.2 order that eliminates reunification as a concurrent permanent plan when a TPR has been filed within 65 days of the entry and service of that order.

G.S. 7B-1001(a)(5) is amended to specify the written procedural requirements for an appeal of an order eliminating reunification as a concurrent permanent plan when a TPR has not been filed within 65 days (reducing the time from 180 days) from the entry and service of that order.

Part IX. Reducing the Time Period for Foster Care Licensure

Effective June 21, 2017, DHHS is required under this part to grant or deny an application for a foster care license within three months from the date of application. The agency must also examine other timeframes for processing foster care applications to reduce the time to approve or deny an application.

Part X. DSS Observation before Reunification (Rylan's Law)

Effective June 21, 2017, Part X amends G.S. 7B-903.1(c) requiring DSS to observe and provide documentation of at least two visits between the child and the removal parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker before recommending to the court the child's return of physical custody to such person.

Appendix B. Definitions and Acronyms

Definitions

These general definitions of terms used in the report are not academic or officially sanctioned. They are intended to reflect how the terms were used in the course of SSWG discussions.

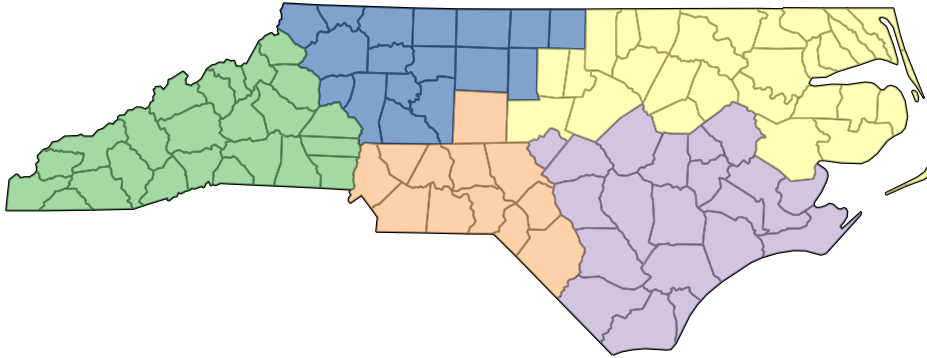
Term	Definition /Description
Compliance	Adhering to the terms/standards/policies outlined in relevant contractual agreements and/or applicable laws
Corrective Action Plan	Step-by-step plan that is developed jointly by DHHS and the local social services agency to resolve a situation that has resulted in either (1) extended non-compliance or (2) an urgent circumstance. <i>See G.S. 108A-74.</i>
Dashboard	The “Social Services Transparency and Wellness Dashboard” that is required to be developed by an outside organization. This tool will integrate existing data into a publicly available interface that will serve as a “report card” for the performance of local social services agencies. <i>See S.L. 2017-41, § 2.1.(d).</i>
Extended Non-Compliance	A state of non-compliance that lasts three consecutive months or five months within any twelve-month period
Non-Compliance	Failure to adhere to terms/standards/policies outlined in relevant contractual agreements or applicable laws
Program Administration	The day-to-day duties associated with program and service delivery at the local level, often involves direct client contact
Program Consultants	Individuals with program-specific knowledge who are capable of carrying out monitoring duties and providing technical assistance and can support local departments of social services in the administration of programs
Program Supervision	The provision of oversight and support to entities charged with program administration
Regional Department of Social Services	A local agency that serves more than one county and provides one or more social services. Counties may voluntarily create regional departments beginning in March 2019.
Technical Assistance	The provision of guidance and support by an individual or entity with specific expertise in that field, program, or problem area

Commonly Used Acronyms

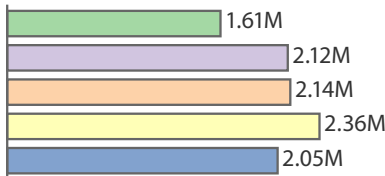
Acronym	Long-Form Reference
AAA	Area Agencies on Aging
AOC	Administrative Office of the Courts
APR	Adult Program Representative
APS	Adult Protective Services
BOCC	Board of County Commissioners
CFSR	Child and Family Services Review
CHSA	Consolidated Human Services Agency
CHSB	Consolidated Human Services Board
COG	Council of Government
CPR	Children's Program Representatives
CPS	Child Protective Services
CQI	Continuous Quality Improvement
DAAS	Division of Aging and Adult Services
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
DHSR	Division of Health Services Regulation
DMA	Division of Medical Assistance
DSS	Division of Social Services
HR	Human Resources
LME/MCO	Local Management Entity/Managed Care Organization
NCACC	North Carolina Association of County Commissioners
NC FAST	North Carolina Families Assessing Services Through Technology
NCGA	North Carolina General Assembly
NCSL	National Conference of State Legislators
PH	Public Health
SHRA	State Human Resources Act
SNAP/FNS	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/Food and Nutrition Services
SOG	School of Government, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
SS	Social Services
SSWG	Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group
TA	Technical Assistance

Appendix C. SSWG Regional Mapsⁱ

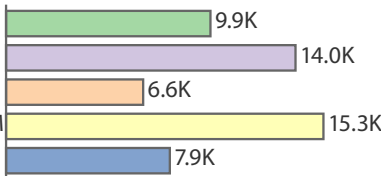
Proposed 1: Population, Judicial Districts, and Network (Five) Regions



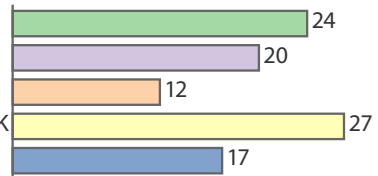
Population (2017)



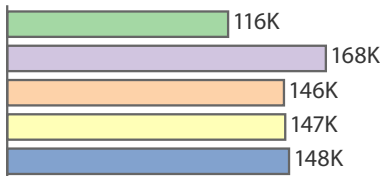
Area (Square Miles)



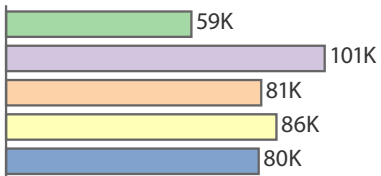
Number of Counties in Region



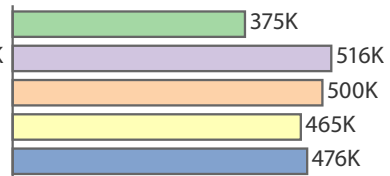
Food Stamp Recipients (Monthly Average)



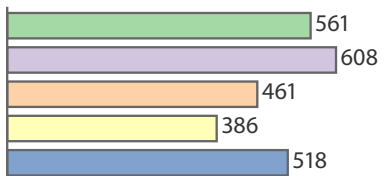
Open CSS Cases



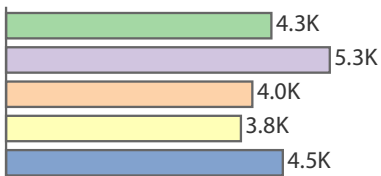
Unduplicated Medicaid Eligibles



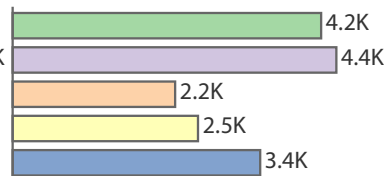
FTEs Needed for Child Welfare



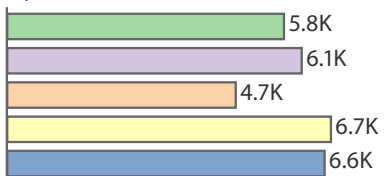
Number of Children Maltreated



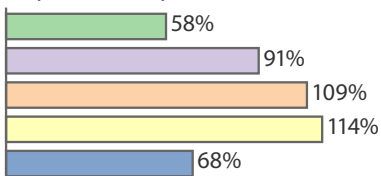
Total Foster Care Cases



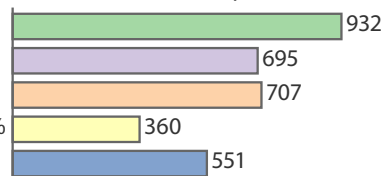
Monthly Recipients of Special Assistance



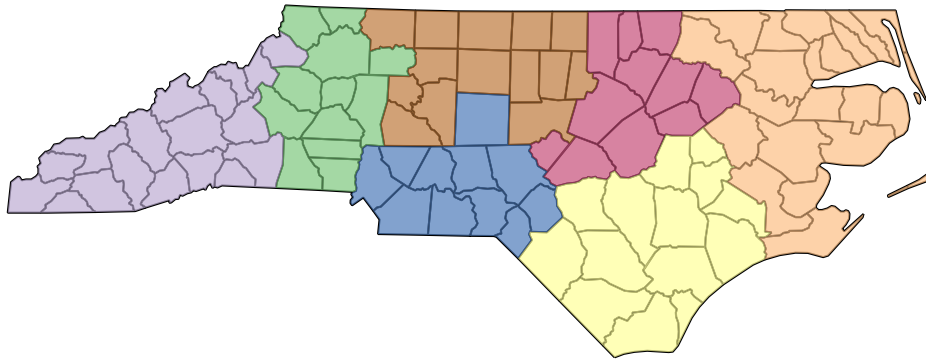
Projected Change in Population Proportion of 65+



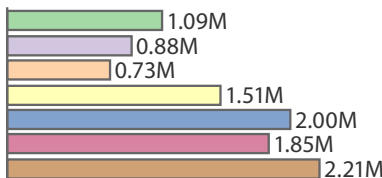
Substantiated APS Reports



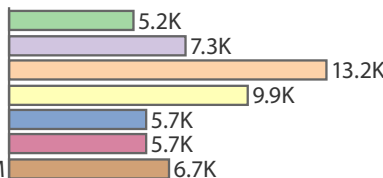
Proposed 2: Population, Judicial Districts, and Network (Seven) Regions



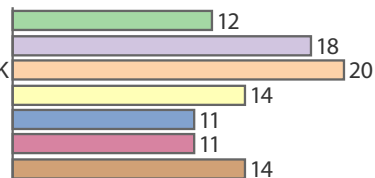
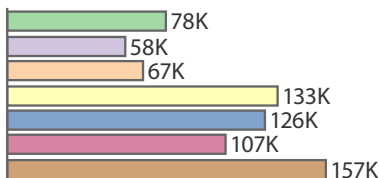
Population (2017)



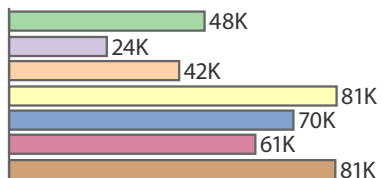
Area (Square Miles)



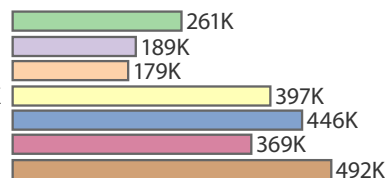
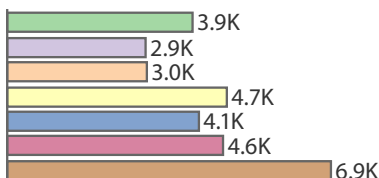
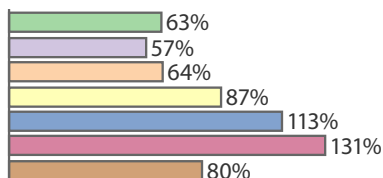
Number of Counties in Region

Food Stamp Recipients
(Monthly Average)

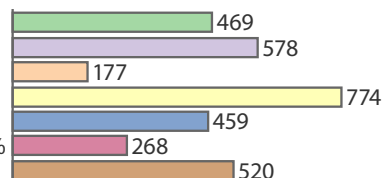
Open CSS Cases



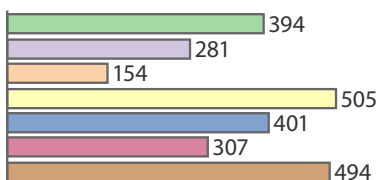
Unduplicated Medicaid Eligibles

Monthly Recipients of
Special AssistanceProjected Change in
Population Proportion of 65+

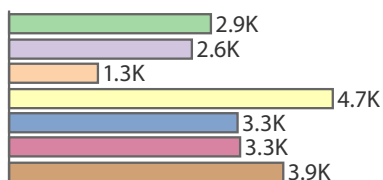
Substantiated APS Reports



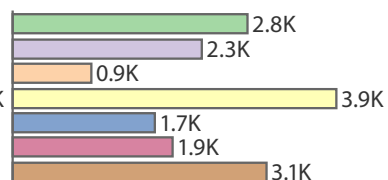
FTEs Needed for Child Welfare



Number of Children Maltreated



Total Foster Care Cases



i. Maps and data are available via the "Materials" linked heading under the main "Social Services Working Group" heading on the UNC School of Government's microsite at www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials.

Appendix D. Methodology for Survey of Natural Networks; Data Sources

Methodology

The Social Services Working Group (SSWG) decided that it might be valuable to investigate some of the natural relationships that occur between county social services departments. In order to effectively measure these relationships, the first step was to define what we would consider a “relationship.” We wanted to specify connections that extend beyond informal communication to something structural that could be affected by drawing regional lines (e.g., counties sharing staff, one county providing services on behalf of another, or frequent referrals of cases involving conflicts of interest). The SSWG distributed a Qualtrics survey to county social services directors to collect data on both the counties that have relationships as well as on the strength of those relationships, measured by the frequency that counties interact within the confines of the previously defined parameters. First, the survey asked for the respondent’s county, and then it posed the following questions:

1. Please identify up to six counties that your county engages with on a regular basis. Please include only inter-county relationships that involve sharing resources or staff. Examples include exchanging conflict of interest cases and sharing staff, programs, or resources.
2. Please indicate how often your county interacted with each of the following counties during 2017:
 - a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Monthly
 - d. Quarterly
 - e. Annually
3. Please take this opportunity to elaborate on your county’s relationship with each of the previously indicated counties. What does each relationship involve? What staff, programs, or resources are shared?

The SSWG collected full responses from roughly eighty-eight counties. Although an additional few responses were not completed, we elected to use any response that had identified counties and their respective frequencies, because we assumed the counties had responded accurately to the portion of the survey from which we used the data. After collecting the data, the SSWG scored the responses from 0 to 5, with 0 being no interaction between a county and the indicated counties and 5 indicating daily interaction. One should note that there was an effective maximum “strength” of 10 between any two counties, which occurred under the scenario where both counties indicated interacting with one another daily.

We next supplemented the data collected from the survey with data on county adjacencies, e.g., which counties share borders. This added a “strength” of 2 between each pair of contiguous counties and means that our maximum strength between any two counties would be 12, those that indicated interacting with each other daily and that share a border.

The SSWG then used the software Gephi to apply the Louvain Method to the data.ⁱ The Louvain Method is a way to detect “communities” within networks, which are identified by stronger connections within a community than between communities. Basically, the software running the Louvain Method looked at each county (in our case) and iteratively checked to see if grouping certain counties together would increase the overall strength of the networks. The total strength of the output is measured by adding the strengths of connections that were put into the same communities. Consider the following example.

- County A and County B both indicate working together daily and have a shared border; the two counties thus will have a strength of 12.
- County B shares a border with County C, but the two counties don’t work together at all; they will have a strength of 2.
- County C and County D both indicate working together daily and have a shared border; they will have a strength of 12.
- The Louvain Method determines that County A and County B should be grouped together and that County C and County D should be grouped together, given that their connections are stronger than other combinations.

This is an oversimplification for illustration purposes. There is an additional part to the process, but an explanation of it is not necessary to understand what the outcomes represent.ⁱⁱ

Although the software proposes an optimal number of groupings, changing parameters during the process can result in more or fewer communities. The SSWG used the software to generate groups of five, seven, and ten regions that were optimized for the strengths of within-region connections. These “network” maps provided the foundation for the SSWG’s efforts to create regional supervision maps. As discussed in the report, the SSWG modified the network maps to align with judicial district borders and minimize differences in total population and clients served across regions.

i. For more information about the Louvain Method, see Vincent D. Blondel et al., *Fast Unfolding of Communities in Large Networks*, J. STAT. MECH. (2008), available for download at <https://arxiv.org/abs/0803.0476>.

ii. Outcomes are available via the “Materials” linked heading under the main “Social Services Working Group” heading on the UNC School of Government’s microsite at www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials.

Data Sources

The maps that resulted from SSWG discussions incorporated data from many different sources. Below is a brief description of those sources.

Data Topic	Year	Source
Population	2017	N.C. Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM), Log Into North Carolina (LINC), https://www.osbm.nc.gov/facts-figures/linc
Area (Square Miles)	2016	National Association of Counties (NACo); Mapping County Data, http://www.naco.org/
Number of Children Maltreated	FY 2016–2017	Dean F. Duncan et al., <i>Management Assistance for Child Welfare, Work First, and Food & Nutrition Services in North Carolina</i> (V3.2, 2018), http://ssw.unc.edu/ma/
Total Number of Foster Care Cases	FY 2016–2017	Dean F. Duncan et al., <i>Management Assistance for Child Welfare, Work First, and Food & Nutrition Services in North Carolina</i> (V3.2, 2018), http://ssw.unc.edu/ma/
Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) Needed for Child Welfare	2016	N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, <i>Child Welfare Master Workbook</i>
Average Monthly Recipients of Food Stamps	FY 2016–2017	Dean F. Duncan et al., <i>Management Assistance for Child Welfare, Work First, and Food & Nutrition Services in North Carolina</i> (V3.2, 2018), http://ssw.unc.edu/ma/
Unduplicated Medicaid Eligibles	2017	N.C. Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM), Log Into North Carolina (LINC), https://www.osbm.nc.gov/facts-figures/linc
Open CSS Cases	8/31/17	N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services
Substantiated APS Reports	FY 2016–2017	N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Aging and Adult Services, APS Register Data
Percentage Change in Proportion of Population 65+ 2010–2030	2010	UNC Population Center, <i>Carolina Demography</i> , http://demography.cpc.unc.edu/resources/data-tables/
Average Monthly Recipients of Special Assistance	FY 2016–2017	N.C. Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM), Log Into North Carolina (LINC), https://www.osbm.nc.gov/facts-figures/linc