

Director's Budget Proposal and Salary Study Report

Presented by:

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Director, Rutherford County Department of Social Services

I. Purpose of This Report

The purpose of this report is to inform the DSS Board that a budget proposal has been submitted to the County Manager requesting the addition and reclassification of key positions to strengthen operational continuity, leadership stability, and fiscal resilience.

In addition, this report includes a Salary Study purpose and framework intended to promote equity, retention, and morale through fiscally responsible, targeted adjustments that recognize qualifications, experience, and professional accountability while acknowledging limited resources.

Requested positions and reclassification include:

Deputy Director

CPS Lead Worker

Foster Care Lead Worker

Child Support Lead Worker

Accounting Technician III reclassification to Accounting Technician IV

II. Background & Identified Risk

Over the past several years, the agency has experienced sudden supervisory departures in critical program areas. When supervisors leave unexpectedly:

Case oversight gaps occur.

Staff lack consistent direction and decision-making support.

Compliance and documentation risks increase.

Director time is diverted from strategic leadership to operational crisis management.

Staff morale declines due to uncertainty and workload redistribution.

These disruptions create service instability for vulnerable children and families. As a public child welfare agency, continuity of leadership and fiscal operations is a compliance, safety, and risk management necessity.

In addition to program leadership risk, the agency faces fiscal continuity risk. Our current Accountant can retire within the next two years. At present, DSS budget development knowledge is concentrated in one individual. Without intentional cross-training and structured succession planning, the agency is vulnerable to disruption in financial operations, audit readiness, and budget development continuity.

III. Current Structural Vulnerability

Currently, the agency has limited formal succession structure beneath the Director. Program expertise is concentrated in single supervisory roles. When a supervisor exits, there is no built-in tier of program-level leadership to immediately absorb responsibility.

Similarly, in Finance, the technical knowledge required to prepare, manage, and project the DSS budget is not formally shared across staff. This creates a single-point dependency in a high-risk operational area. Institutional knowledge — both programmatic and fiscal — is at risk of being lost during transitions.

IV. Proposed Structural Enhancements

Deputy Director

Purpose: Provide executive-level operational oversight, serve as acting Director when necessary, support cross-program coordination, and strengthen long-term succession planning.

Impact: Increases executive capacity, reduces single-point leadership dependency, and enhances strategic continuity.

CPS Lead Worker

Purpose: Provide case consultation and oversight support, ensure investigative consistency and policy compliance, and maintain workflow stability during supervisory transitions.

Impact: Protects child safety oversight, preserves institutional knowledge, and reduces disruption during vacancies.

Foster Care Lead Worker

Purpose: Provide permanency case guidance, support compliance with state and federal foster care requirements, and ensure stability of permanency planning during supervisory gaps.

Impact: Protects IV-E compliance, maintains placement stability efforts, and reduces permanency delays.

Child Support Lead Worker

Purpose: Provide program-level oversight, maintain performance benchmarks, and ensure continuity in court and enforcement processes.

Impact: Protects program revenue, maintains federal performance standards, and reduces service interruption.

Accounting Technician III Reclassification to Accounting Technician IV

Purpose: Strengthen fiscal continuity by expanding the scope of responsibility to include structured cross-training of an additional finance team member in the development and management of the DSS budget.

This reclassification would formally include:

Training another member of the finance team to prepare and manage the DSS budget.
Developing written internal budget procedures.

Ensuring continuity of operations in the event of retirement, vacancy, or extended leave.
Supporting audit readiness and fiscal compliance.

Impact:

Reduces fiscal risk associated with retirement of the current Accountant within two years.

Prevents loss of institutional budget knowledge.

Protects compliance with state and federal reporting requirements.

Ensures uninterrupted budget preparation and financial operations.

Strengthens internal controls and succession planning within Finance.

This request is a proactive continuity strategy. The cost of investing in knowledge transfer and classification alignment is significantly lower than the risk of operational disruption, audit findings, or emergency consultant costs if fiscal.

V. Strategic Justification

This proposal represents a risk mitigation strategy, a compliance protection measure, a succession planning investment, a workforce stabilization strategy, and a continuity of operations safeguard. Given the complexity of DSS programs and funding streams, leadership and fiscal redundancy are essential to maintaining stability.

Preventive structure is less costly than reactive crisis management.

VI. Fiscal Responsibility

The cost of these positions must be weighed against:

Overtime expenses during vacancies.

Potential compliance findings or corrective action plans.

Staff turnover due to instability.

Delays in permanency outcomes.

Loss of child support revenue due to oversight gaps.

Director capacity diverted from strategic initiatives.

Fiscal disruption caused by unplanned retirement or loss of budget expertise.

Investing in structural stability reduces long-term financial exposure.

VII. Alignment with Agency Goals

This proposal aligns with:

Improved staff supervision and support.

Program accountability and quality assurance.

Leadership development within the agency.

Long-term organizational resilience.

Fiscal accountability and audit readiness.

Stability for children and families served.

Operational stability directly impacts client safety, service outcomes, and public trust.

VIII. Salary Study

Purpose

This report outlines a fair, fiscally responsible approach to salary adjustments that recognizes qualifications, experience, and professional accountability while acknowledging that financial resources are limited. The intent is to promote equity, retention, and morale without creating unsustainable budget commitments.

Context

Current salary structures risk compression by placing employees with differing levels of experience and preparation at similar pay rates. This is particularly evident when employees hired with completed pre-service training are compensated the same as those who require county-funded training to meet minimum requirements. Surrounding counties are addressing this issue through modest, targeted percentage adjustments rather than across-the-board increases.

Guiding Principles

Fiscal Responsibility: Adjustments must be sustainable within existing or limited funding.

Equity: Employees should be compensated based on qualifications, experience, and readiness.

Accountability: Professional responsibility and timely completion of required training should be encouraged.

Market Alignment: Practices should reflect what peer counties are already implementing.

Recommended Salary Adjustment Framework

To balance fairness and affordability, the following percentage-based approach is recommended:

1. Pre-Service Training Recognition

Employees hired with completed pre-service training receive a **3% salary increase**.

This reflects immediate job readiness and cost savings to the county.

2. Training Completion Incentive

Employees who complete all required trainings on time by year-end receive a **1% salary increase**.

This serves as a positive incentive for accountability and reduces reliance on corrective action.

3. Experience-Based Differentiation

Employees receive an additional percentage increase for each year of relevant experience beyond minimum qualifications.

The specific percentage per year is determined by the county based on budget capacity.

This ensures employees do not enter or remain at the same salary level despite differing experience.

Benefits

Prevents salary compression and improves internal equity.

Rewards preparation, experience, and professional responsibility.

Supports recruitment and retention in a competitive labor market.

Aligns with compensation practices used by surrounding counties.

Provides a structured, transparent approach that can be adjusted as funding allows.

Conclusion

This combined report offers a balanced and proactive approach to structural leadership continuity, fiscal succession planning, workforce stabilization, and compensation equity. By investing in strategic

structure and targeted salary alignment, Rutherford County DSS strengthens its ability to maintain safe, compliant, and uninterrupted services for the citizens we serve.

Respectfully Submitted,

Delores "Dee" Hunt

Director, Rutherford County Department of Social Services

SALARY STUDY								
Position Title	Rutherford	McDowell	Polk	Caldwell	Wilkes	Wilson	Burke	Cleveland
FTE'S	158	110					198	220
SOCIAL WORK ADMINISTRATOR I	\$68,904.23						\$79,856.23	\$111,785.44
SOCIAL WORKER TRAINEE	\$38,400.25							
SOCIAL WORKER I	\$40,166.65	\$40,237.00		\$46,271.67	\$45,941.80		\$44,454.28	
SOCIAL WORKER II	\$48,083.04	\$50,142.00		\$54,396.44	\$51,953.33	\$67,824.00	\$54,044.26	
SOCIAL WORKER III (FC/AD)	\$52,608.42	\$56,937.00	\$43,926.00	\$57,629.68	\$58,719.71	\$77,362.00	\$59,842.00	\$58,677.84
SOCIAL WORKER I/A/T (CPS)	\$55,028.47	\$58,524.00	\$48,428.00	\$58,870.88	\$62,064.30	\$71,010.00	\$59,842.00	\$59,217.60
SOCIAL WORKER PROGRAM MGR		\$76,662.00	\$73,471.00	\$85,500.00		\$89,724.00		
SOCIAL WORKER SUPER III	\$62,977.10	\$63,072.00	\$56,059.00	\$70,651.37	\$73,490.43	\$82,325.14	\$72,841.63	\$78,089.44