



**Rutherford County Office Building
289 N. Main Street
Rutherfordton, NC 28139**

Rutherford County

Board of Commissioners

Minutes of May 11, 2026, Special Meeting 1

**Monday, May 11, 2026
5:00 PM**

I. Call to Order

Chairman King called the May 11, 2026, special meeting of the Rutherford County Board of Commissioners to order.

Present: Chairman Bryan King, Vice Chairman Alan Toney, Commissioner Michael Benfield, Commissioner Hunter Haynes, and Commissioner Donnie Haulk.

A. Agenda Approval

Commissioner Haynes moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Haulk seconded the motion. The vote on the motion was:

Ayes: Commissioner King, Commissioner Toney, Commissioner Benfield, Commissioner Haynes, and Commissioner Haulk.

II. Public Hearing

A. ID-26-4479 Public Hearing – Conferring Powers, Responsibilities, and Duties of Rutherford County Board of Social Services

At 5:01 p.m., Chairman King opened the public hearing to receive comments regarding the Rutherford County Board of Commissioners assuming direct control over all activities previously conducted by or through the Rutherford County Board of Social Services. Chairman King stated that the proposed change represents a very important step for the county and noted that several other counties have already adopted similar governance structures. He explained that the Board appreciates the work of the current DSS Board, but that transparency and accountability were significant considerations in evaluating the change. Chairman King further stated that approximately two years ago the county began studying what this transition would entail, and those discussions ultimately led to the current proposal.

Mr. Jamie Brown of Lake Lure spoke in favor of changes within the department, sharing personal experiences involving the custody and protection of his three grandchildren. Mr. Brown stated

that his son is incarcerated and that the children had previously been homeless after their home was repossessed. He described ongoing legal and custody challenges involving DSS, including expenses totaling more than \$10,000 in legal fees. Mr. Brown expressed concerns regarding drug testing procedures and stated that, in his opinion, individuals involved should be prosecuted. He concluded by stating that the situation has been an ongoing battle and that changes are needed within the system.

Ms. Lynn Hoppes, who stated she has served on the DSS Board for approximately six months, addressed concerns regarding staffing and compensation within the department. Ms. Hoppes advised the department lacks sufficient resources and competitive pay, resulting in DSS becoming a training ground for other departments and counties offering higher salaries. She noted that the department has not been fully staffed during her tenure and emphasized the difficulty of maintaining mandated 24/7 child and adult protective services coverage. Ms. Hoppes asked the Board to keep DSS under the State Office of Personnel system and expressed gratitude for the employees who continue to serve the community daily.

Mr. David Brown addressed the Board and acknowledged both the work of the Commissioners and their legal authority under North Carolina General Statute 153A-77 to alter the governance structure of Social Services. Mr. Brown characterized the proposal as one of the most significant governance changes the county could undertake and requested that the Board clearly explain why the restructuring is necessary and why the present time is appropriate for such a transition. He expressed concern that the county currently has no county manager, no DSS director, and that the advocacy board is being dismantled during the proposed transition. Mr. Brown emphasized the potential impact on vulnerable residents, including children, seniors, individuals with mental illness or substance abuse issues, and families dependent on Medicaid services. He asked the Board to identify the specific problems the restructuring is intended to solve, explain how operations and services would be affected during the transition, identify who would be accountable during the process, and describe what safeguards would ensure transparency and prevent political influence over decisions.

Ms. Dana Davis, a community resident and DSS employee, also addressed the Board. Ms. Davis stated that inadequate staffing and insufficiently trained personnel continue to create challenges within the department. She noted that she had previously experienced a county consolidation effort that did not go well and urged the Commissioners to proceed thoughtfully in any restructuring process. Ms. Davis further stated that salary concerns continue to contribute to employee turnover and that positions are sometimes being filled by individuals lacking the necessary training and experience.

Commissioner Haynes responded to Mr. Brown's comments and stated that he would commit to issuing a public letter explaining how he believes the proposed change could improve operations and services. Commissioner Haulk acknowledged that it was difficult for speakers to discuss the issues publicly and thanked them for their comments. Commissioner Benfield stated that responsibility for DSS operations ultimately falls back on the Board of Commissioners and that the Board wants to ensure the program is operated successfully.

Commissioner Toney informed that DSS is an important part of the county and explained that the possibility of assuming direct control has been studied for a long period of time. Commissioner Toney expressed concern regarding employee turnover, stating that staff members are "jumping ship left and right," leaving vulnerable residents without adequate support. He further advised that DSS is not currently performing at the level needed and emphasized that the County remains responsible when problems occur. Commissioner Toney stated that the number one goal is safety and acknowledged that assuming direct control would add significant responsibilities to the Board of Commissioners.

Mr. David Brown later asked whether the proposal reflected a lack of confidence in the current DSS Board. Chairman King responded that the current DSS Board consists of good people, but that citizens are looking to the county government for answers. He stated that if the Board proceeded with the change, the Board of Commissioners would be able to speak with one voice and provide stronger oversight of the department. Chairman King also noted that financial considerations were part of the discussion.

There being no further comments, Chairman King closed the public hearing at 5:34 p.m.

III. Adjournment

At 5:39 P.M. Commissioner Benfield made a motion to adjourn. Vice Chairman Toney seconded the motion. The vote on the motion was:

Ayes: Commissioner King, Commissioner Toney, Commissioner Benfield, Commissioner Haynes and Commissioner Haulk.

Noes: None

Chairman, Board of Commissioners

Vice Chairman, Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Clerk, Board of Commissioners