

## Buncombe County Agenda Item Information Sheet

**AGENDA ITEM:**

Budget Amendment for Additional Staffing related to NC FAST (North Carolina Families Access Services through Technology)

**MEETING DATE:** January 06, 2015

**REQUESTED BY:** Jim Holland for Amanda L. Stone

**Background information**

NC FAST is a new state developed and implemented system that is being used to determine eligibility for all public assistance programs within Health & Human Services. The Affordable Care Act requires a centralized access point for applying for benefits as well as the ability to communicate with the Federally-Facilitated Marketplace. North Carolina has implemented NC FAST in stages. Food and Nutrition Services was implemented first. Medicaid, by far the most complicated system, is now being implemented statewide. The legacy state computer system is over thirty years old and does not meet federal requirements. Transitioning to the new system has required significant county investment as well as significant additional staff time.

NC Department of Health and Human Services has given counties staffing estimates necessary in order to meet the timeliness and quality standards of the State and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The current state recommendation is to add an equivalent of eighty-two (**82**) total new positions (68 Income Maintenance Caseworker II Positions, 9 Income Maintenance Supervisor II Positions, 1 Income Maintenance Supervisor III Position, and 4 Public Information Assistant V Positions). Total net annualized county cost would be estimated at \$2,680,195 for this staffing level.

However, through the use of innovative methods for meeting the increased staff time in order to assure timely and accurate benefit issuance, Buncombe County HHS's recommendation is to request the addition of twenty-three (**23**) new positions. Sixteen (16) of the positions requested are Income Maintenance Caseworker II positions, four (4) Public Information Assistant V's, two (2) Income Maintenance Supervisor II positions and one (1) Income Maintenance Supervisor III position. With a structure that assumes more responsibility within the Call Center, Front Desk, On-Site support and Subject Matter Experts as well as additional efficiencies, it is recommended that Buncombe can meet the additional requirements for NC FAST with twenty-three (**23**) new positions.

The federal government oversight agencies of USDA and CMS require these tasks be performed by "merited government employees" which prohibits the use of contract employees/agreements. Effective January 1<sup>st</sup> the ACA requires all employers to offer health insurance to employees working at 30 hours or greater. This requirement will eliminate our ability to rely on temporary staffing to address ongoing staffing needs.

<p><b>Pro's</b>  These additional staff will allow us to meet the mandated time standards for processing benefits and assure that citizens applying for services are adequately screened and eligibility is determined correctly. The additional staff time and information required for using NC FAST is a result of federally-mandated requirements that must be met as outlined in the Affordable Care Act.</p>	<p><b>Con's</b>  Without the additional staff and supervision, time standards for applications and reviews are likely to be exceeded. This will result in potential penalties to the county, citizens not receiving benefits within mandated times, and the possibility of eligibility being determined incorrectly, which could result in substantial penalties for the County.</p>
<p><b>Funds required</b>  The total cost for the new positions beginning January 2015 is \$712,728. The net county cost will be \$356,364 for the remainder of this fiscal year. In FY16, annualized net county cost for these additional positions is estimated to be \$748,588.</p>	
<p><b>Alternatives</b>  Maintaining current staffing levels with the certainty of not meeting state and federal standards for processing/maintaining public assistance caseloads. In addition to not meeting program requirements the potential loss of benefits will impact the health and safety of citizens as well the potential loss of federal benefits that fund health care providers and grocery retailers. Counties in NC are mandated to provide eligibility of federal and state public assistance programs and failure to do so at the required timeliness and quality standards can result in the State assuming the operations of these functions and charging the county for the cost of operation.</p>	
<p><b>Action recommended:</b>  Allocate funding for sixteen (16) additional IMC II positions, four (4) PIA V positions, two (2) additional IMS II and one (1) IMS III position beginning January 2015 for a cost of \$712,728. The net county cost is \$356,364. In FY16, annualized net county cost for these additional positions is estimated to be \$748,588.</p>	