



Jackson County
North Carolina



Department of
Social Services

Strengthening Our Community



Every child deserves to grow up in a safe and nurturing family. When families are in crisis, however, our most important systems often fail them. ***This is solvable.***

The path to healing begins in the courtroom—yet too often that’s where we fall short.

When a child is removed from their home, the court must confirm it was necessary. In North Carolina, a shortage of parent attorneys—the legal advocates all parents are entitled to—delays court hearings. And because in many counties, child welfare cases are heard only once or twice per month, delays (called continuances) can easily add up to months.

Court delays harm children.

Court delays keep children in foster care longer, exacerbating their trauma and denying reunification for parents who make progress.

Children are sleeping in offices.

Delays also mean more children are in temporary foster care, which is hard to come by. When there is nowhere else to go, children sleep in Department of Social Services (DSS) offices.

DSS staff are leaving the field.

Caseworkers are overwhelmed by court prep, emergency placements and overtime. As a result, the system is losing the people who hold it together.

Parent attorneys are overworked, underpaid and in short supply.

Today, just eight part-time parent attorneys serve nearly 400 children in care across seven WNC counties. And they’re paid less than they were in 2005.

In 2024, court continuances happened **over 60%** of the time in some Western NC counties.



The longer children stay in temporary care, the higher their risk of falling behind in **school, substance use, and facing lasting health and financial challenges.**



In 2024, children spent **67 nights** sleeping in the Jackson County DSS office.

Staff turnover in local DSS offices is skyrocketing—**reaching 100% annually in some counties.**

While capital cases pay up to **\$500/hour**, parent attorneys now earn just **\$65/hour.**



This is solvable. It starts by paying parent attorneys fairly.



New videos, created by Jackson County DSS with funding from Dogwood Health Trust, bring these stories to life through the eyes of caseworkers, judges, attorneys, foster parents and those working in the system every day.



Visit [JCDSS.org](https://www.jcdss.org) to use the toolkit and share these stories with those who can help make change