



Mendocino County
Department of Social Services
Healthy People, Healthy Communities



DeNeese Parker, Director
Stephen White, Assistant Director

Memorandum

Date:	February 19, 2026
To:	Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
From:	DeNeese Parker, Director, Department of Social Services
Subject:	Request to Hire All Budgeted Positions to Maintain Fiscal Stability and Service Delivery

Executive Summary

This memo requests Board authorization for the Department of Social Services (DSS) to hire all budgeted positions approved in the mid-year budget, without requiring Strategic Hiring approval or individual Board action, provided positions are fully budgeted and the Department continues to meet required funding ratios. Delays or freezes in hiring present both fiscal and operational risks that undermine reimbursement maximization, workforce stability, and service continuity.

Background and Fiscal Context

The Department of Social Services was not subject to the Countywide 6 percent reduction, as DSS does not receive County General Fund support, with the exception of Veterans Services and the Public Administrator/Public Guardian programs, which are not realigned and therefore require General Fund support.

As County General Fund contributions have been eliminated, DSS has redirected its realignment funding to meet the In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirements. To ensure no General Fund impact, the Department has absorbed budget reductions that exceed the equivalent of a 6 percent decrease through internal efficiencies, expenditure controls, and revenue maximization strategies.

Staffing Levels and Budgeted Positions

In the mid-year budget revision DSS has budgeted 310 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, with a total salary and benefit cost of \$40,215,817.

- As of PP 04-26, DSS employed 277 full-time employees and 6 extra-help employees
- In the prior fiscal year, DSS averaged 314 employees
- Current staffing reflects a significant vacancy gap relative to approved and historically necessary staffing levels

Importance of Funding Ratios and Reimbursement

DSS continuously evaluates processes to improve efficiencies, reduce expenditures, increase revenues, and strategically align expenses to maximize State and Federal reimbursement.

A recent test/mock claim run with 310 budgeted positions produced the following ratios:

- 45% Social Services
- 12% CalWORKs
- 43% Other Public Welfare (OPW)

By comparison, last year's second-quarter ratios were:

- 49% Social Services
- 16% CalWORKs
- 36% Other Public Welfare

These ratios are critical because they directly determine the level of State and Federal reimbursement versus reliance on realignment funding. A higher proportion of Other Public Welfare allows DSS to draw down a greater share of State and Federal funds, particularly for generic administrative costs and operational overhead. When Social Services and CalWORKs percentages are higher, the Department must rely more heavily on realignment funds.

Strategically maintaining these ratios reduces fiscal pressure on realignment and strengthens long-term sustainability.

Fiscal Impact of Vacancies and Hiring Delays

At first quarter, DSS was budgeted at 292 positions and projected to utilize \$3,495,576 in one-time funds to remain balanced. With 310 positions budgeted, current projections show the Department utilizing approximately \$956,160 of 2011 Realignment Fund balance, a substantial improvement driven by improved ratios and reimbursement.

Hiring freezes or prolonged delays disrupt these ratios, reduce reimbursement, and increase reliance on one-time or reserve funding creating avoidable fiscal risk.

Compliance and Audit Risk Considerations

Many DSS programs operate under State and Federal mandates with required performance standards, caseload ratios, and processing timelines. Prolonged vacancies increase risk of:

- Noncompliance with State and Federal program requirements
- Delayed eligibility determinations
- Increased audit findings or corrective action plans
- Increased workload strain leading to higher turnover

Maintaining approved staffing levels is not solely an operational concern; it is directly tied to regulatory compliance, audit performance, and fiscal growth.

Operational Impacts of the Strategic Hiring Process

While the Strategic Hiring Process serves an important Countywide function, its application to fully budgeted, non-General Fund DSS positions creates unintended operational consequences:

- Slows recruitment and onboarding
- Creates bottlenecks requiring large, simultaneous hiring efforts rather than steady workforce replacement
- Increases training and supervision strain
- Exacerbates workload pressures on existing staff
- Raises risks to service delivery, compliance, and employee retention

Currently, DSS has 277 full-time employees, meaning approximately 33 positions would need to be filled to achieve approved staffing. Hiring positions gradually through natural attrition is significantly more effective and less disruptive than attempting to recruit and onboard large cohorts after prolonged delays.

Request

At this time, I respectfully request that, upon approval of the mid-year budget authorizing 310 budgeted positions, the Department of Social Services be authorized to:

- Hire all budgeted positions without utilization of the Strategic Hiring Process or separate Board approval, provided positions are fully budgeted, no County General Fund is utilized, and required funding ratios are maintained

Conclusion

Timely hiring of approved positions is essential to maintaining fiscal stability, maximizing State and Federal reimbursement, ensuring workforce sustainability, and protecting service delivery to the community. Allowing DSS to hire within its approved budgeted authority aligns with sound fiscal management and supports the Board's broader goals of operational efficiency and risk mitigation.

I appreciate the Board's consideration and am available to answer any questions or provide additional fiscal details.

Respectfully submitted,

DeNeese Parker

DeNeese Parker
Director, Department of Social Services