

# PROPOSED MAPS

## SOCIAL SERVICES REGIONAL SUPERVISION AND COLLABORATION WORKING GROUP

The Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (SSWG) would like feedback about two proposed regional maps. The maps are available online:

<https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/notices>

**Please submit comments by email to [sswg@sog.unc.edu](mailto:sswg@sog.unc.edu) by Friday, February 16.** Comments may also be sent by mail to Pratibha Sirdeshmukh, UNC School of Government, CB #3330 Knapp-Sanders Building, Chapel Hill, NC, 27599-3330.

### **Why are these maps being proposed?**

In 2017, the NC General Assembly enacted legislation directing the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to develop a plan for establishing regional offices. Once established, the regional offices would work closely with the central office in Raleigh to supervise and support county administration of social services programs. The legislation also created the SSWG and directed it to develop recommendations to help guide DHHS's development of the plan. The SSWG's recommendations are required to address the size, number, and location of the regions.

### **What is the purpose of the regions?**

North Carolina has a state-supervised, county-administered system of social services. The term "social services" includes a wide range of programs, such as economic services (i.e., Medicaid, Food and Nutrition Services), child welfare, and adult protective services. The counties take the lead in administering most of these programs in their communities, but the state is responsible for oversight of the entire system.

These new regions will allow DHHS to provide staff, technical assistance, and support to counties in a more coordinated, collaborative, and community-specific manner. The SSWG expects that regional staff will assist the counties within their regions in a number of critical ways. For example, regions will seek to promote consistency in program administration across counties, support innovation and best practice development, resolve conflicts, bolster quality assurance and improvement activities, and enhance fiscal stewardship.

**It is important to remember that these regions are not designed to create a system of regional departments of social services.** Rather, the regions are designed to extend supervision and support more directly and immediately from DHHS to the county departments.

## Who will work in the regions?

The number of staff will vary from region to region but at a minimum, each region will have:

- A regional administrator;
- One or more administrative staff persons;
- Program consultants who have program-specific knowledge (e.g., in child welfare, adult services, Medicaid, food and nutrition, child support); and
- Additional staff to provide general technical assistance (e.g., in human resources, budget, information technology).

The SSWG does not expect that each region will have a program consultant for every social services program. Rather, the group expects that DHHS and the regional administrators will work together to identify needs in each region and tailor the staffing model appropriately. For example, one region may have three child welfare consultants while another region may need only one. Or regions may share a program consultant for a highly specialized but not heavily utilized program.

More information about the proposed staffing model will be included in the SSWG's report, which will be available in early April.

## What factors guided the SSWG when developing these maps?

The SSWG agreed on several key factors to guide their planning for the regions:

- **No county should be split** into different regions.
- Regions should include **contiguous** counties.
- **Judicial districts** should not be disrupted. This factor became a priority because of the volume of child welfare work that counties conduct in district court. In order for regional offices to provide appropriate support to the counties in these cases, they should have a solid understanding of the dynamics and local practices in the districts within the region.
- Regions should have a reasonable balance in the total **population** served.
- Regions should be comparable in **geographic size**. Because regional staff will spend a significant amount of time traveling between counties, it would be unreasonable to assign staff in one region a significantly larger geographic area than staff in another region.
- Regions should strive to preserve **natural networks** that have developed over time. Many counties work together to provide services. For example, counties may share staff or trade cases when one county has a conflict of interest. The SSWG believes the regional offices should support and cultivate effective relationships and networks. The SSWG surveyed the county directors to identify existing relationships and used that data as the foundation for developing the maps.

Both of the proposed maps attempt to address all five of these issues. The first three factors are consistent in both maps. For the last two factors (population and geographic size), the SSWG tried to strike a balance. For example, a region that has a larger population may encompass a

smaller geographic area and a region with a larger geographic area may have a smaller population.

## What are the primary differences between the two proposed maps?

Some of the differences between the two maps that sparked discussion in the SSWG are:

- **Number of regions:** One map has five regions and the other has seven. Some members of the SSWG would like to have seven regions because they would like DHHS staff to be able to work closely with a small number of counties. There is some concern, however, about the availability of knowledgeable, experienced staff to work in these regional offices. The SSWG wants to ensure that the model it proposes will allow for high-quality staff who have deep expertise to be part of this new regional support system.
- **Size of regions:** If the region is too large, it is possible that staff will have a difficult time traveling to each county on a regular basis. The group speculated that for larger regions, the regional administrator would likely need to allow some staff to focus on one part of the region while others focus on the rest.
- **Military and tribal communities:** The SSWG is interested in ensuring that regional staff develop appropriate expertise and understanding of the unique needs of large military and/or tribal communities. The five region map does an excellent job clustering counties to meet this objective but the seven region map does not.

## What type of feedback is the SSWG seeking?

The SSWG will be releasing a full report by early April. Before finalizing its recommendations, the group would like to hear now from the public and other stakeholders specifically about the proposed maps. The group would like to hear your thoughts and reasoning on issues such as:

- Is one map better than the other? If so, why?
- Are there modifications to one or both maps that would significantly improve them?
- How will the maps impact working relationships? Community relationships?
- Are there other factors in establishing regions that should take greater priority than those listed on pages 2-3 (e.g., judicial districts, population, geography, networks)?

The SSWG looks forward to hearing from you about these proposed regions. Please submit comments by email to [sswg@sog.unc.edu](mailto:sswg@sog.unc.edu) by Friday, February 16. Comments may also be sent by mail to Pratibha Sirdeshmukh, UNC School of Government, CB #3330 Knapp-Sanders Building, Chapel Hill, NC, 27599-3330. Questions about this project may be directed to Aimee Wall, UNC School of Government, [wall@sog.unc.edu](mailto:wall@sog.unc.edu) or 919.843.4957.