



Columbia
Urban League

1400 Barnwell Street
Columbia, SC 29201

P 803 799 8150
F 803 254 6052

www.columbiaurbanleague.org

May 5, 2014

Empowering Communities.
Changing Lives.

The Honorable Senator Tom Young
South Carolina Senate, District 24
506 Gressette Building
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Senator Young:

First of all, as someone who has worked over the past three decades in human services with a strong focus on youth leadership development, serving primarily disadvantaged and underserved populations, I commend you and the members of the Senate DSS Oversight Committee for your review of child welfare. **For, our children are our future.**

During my tenure as President and CEO of the Columbia Urban League, it has been my privilege to work with many committed and outstanding directors including director Koller. During Ms. Koller's tenure, she has emphasized quality of care and accountability for all clients of DSS. Although the death of any child is one too many, under Director Koller's leadership, DSS has seen a twenty five percent decrease in child deaths with DSS's involvement. This is significant and is directly credited to Director's Koller's leadership. Also, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article entitled "**States Tackling Child Abuse**" dated Friday, March 21, 2014, "South Carolina was not on the list of the 10 States with the highest fatality rates for child abuse and neglect per 100,000."

Over the past year, we have had some shocking revelations about child abuse and neglect that have resulted into fatalities. Many of these fatalities could have been prevented with more vigilance from our community. In an op-ed in *The State* newspaper on March 21, 2014, I stated that "yet, unlike law enforcement, DSS is often **blamed** when a parent harms or kills their child. DSS no more creates the criminal abuse it responds to than law enforcement does. Yet, in many instances, some people place the sole responsibility for child deaths at DSS's feet. It is unfair to totally condemn and persecute an agency mandated to address, investigate, and review one of the worst events in our society: the death of a child.

I agree that when such deaths occur, there must be transparency and accountability; the public's trust must never be taken lightly. More importantly, however, is the fact that our children's well-being, individually and collectively, is EVERYONE's responsibility. All of us play a crucial role in keeping our children safe - - not just child advocates, DSS, politicians, medical or education professionals, but also the grocery store clerk, the church volunteer, the neighbor next door, and the casual bystander at a community event.



Columbia
Urban League

1400 Barnwell Street
Columbia, SC 29201

P 803 799 8150
F 803 254 6052

www.columbiaurbanleague.org

*Empowering Communities.
Changing Lives.*

I encourage DSS and its stakeholders to mount a campaign much like what law enforcement has done with its well-known "CrimeStoppers" initiative: create an 800 number for anyone to call and report suspected child abuse or neglect.

There is always someone who knows when a child is in trouble; we should never look the other way. We all must take responsibility in our community and provide the safety net our children need."

In conclusion, at the end of the day, we must find a way to work on one accord for the welfare of our children, especially those in DSS's care.

Thank you for your service to the citizens of South Carolina.

Sincerely,



James T. McLawhorn, Jr.
President and Chief Executive Office

JTMjr/ch