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COMMITTEES:  
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GENERAL  
JUDICIARY

May 1, 2014

Dear Senator Courson,

I write today to urge you to immediately create a Special Committee to investigate the apparent abuse of power by Governor Nikki Haley, her staff, and the senior management of the Department of Social Services (DSS) in their efforts to derail the investigation into children's deaths as a result of mismanagement at the Department.

As you are aware, for the past several months the Senate has been investigating the reports of children being put in danger and, in some cases, tragically dying as a result of efforts to lower numbers and meet arbitrary goals set under Governor Haley's DSS. The bipartisan members of the DSS Oversight Subcommittee of the Senate's General Committee, as well as other leaders in this body, have heard chilling testimony from coroners, child advocates, former DSS employees, and even received letters from current employees about how the culture at DSS has led to children being kept in danger, being put out on the streets, and being handed off to consultants with no regard for child safety, because of misplaced priorities.

On several occasions, our Senators have come together with the leadership of Chairman Tom Young, Sen. Joel Lourie and Sen. Katrina Shealy to put partisanship aside in the effort to get to the bottom of what is happening at DSS. But at every turn, the Subcommittee, members of the Senate, and even those in the news media have had great difficulty in obtaining information and getting honest, consistent, answers from the Department and from the Governor's office.

Director Koller refused to testify for months, and only eventually agreed to appear before the Subcommittee under the threat of subpoena. Requests for numbers from the Department of Social Services have been repeatedly delayed, and when they are granted, the numbers are later revised or disputed by the Governor's office. Multiple whistle-blowers within the agency have contacted Senators to tell of increasing pressure at the Department not to cooperate with the investigation, or to delay responses to our requests.

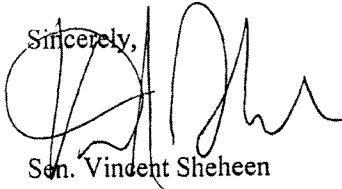
Now, we saw a new report in the media this week about one of our own Senators being called into the Governor's office in an effort to change her approach to the DSS investigation.

It has become increasingly clear that Governor Haley and her administration have stonewalled the investigation into children's endangerment from within DSS, and even used the power of the Governor's office to try to cover-up the problem through pressure and intimidation. It is time to find out just how deep this deception and abuse of power goes.

I urge you as the leader of the Senate to immediately form a bipartisan, special committee, with subpoena power, to investigate efforts by Governor Nikki Haley, her staff, and officials at DSS to interfere with the investigation into child endangerment due to mismanagement at the Department.

On an issue of this importance, and as children continue to be put in danger, we cannot wait to take action. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Vincent Sheheen", written over the word "Sincerely,".

Sen. Vincent Sheheen