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I am faxing this letter to the attention of anyone that can ensure the safety of the children that are identified in the following pages. This letter is regarding a case that a Barnwell County Department of Social Services case that has been open since September of 2013. The lack of communication, action, and follow through that this agency has conducted is unbelievable. The children involved in this case are being taken care of in the homes where they are currently located, and the Barnwell office is refusing to communicate with the caretakers and the mother of the children to ensure what is best in regards to these children. Please help these children remain safe by passing this letter along to someone that can look into this matter objectively. Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Thank you for any help you can give me with this matter.

This fax is 10 pages long (including the cover sheet). If you do not receive all 10 pages, please contact me.

Fax to: 803-734-5167

Fax from: 864-226-1987

Phone number: 864-202-5267-Carmen Elkins

January 13, 2015

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Carmen Leigh Pigman Elkins, and I am the maternal aunt of three children involved in an investigation being conducted by the Barnwell County Office of The Department of Social Services (BCDSS). The children are Kinlee Elizabeth Ray (DOB 12/04/08), Juleigh AnnaGrace Pigman (DOB 10/18/2010), and Colton Paul Pigman (DOB 10/07/2011). My younger sister is Kathryn (Katie) Elizabeth Pigman (07/12/85).

After being notified of the removal of my nieces and nephews, I contacted the BCDSS by phone. I called around 8:30 am on November 25th and left messages on the voicemails of Ms. Ethel Millhouse, Ms. Audrey Hay-Cave, and Ms. Susan Jerkins. I was offering my services to care for one or more of the children if needed. I left my telephone number, and requested to be called back at the earliest convenience. I didn't get a call from anyone. During my planning time that afternoon I called the office again, spoke to the receptionist, and was able to speak with Susan Jerkins. I explained who I was, and that I was offering to help care for the children if needed. She indicated that she would get back in touch with me after she spoke with Ms. Cave. I didn't hear from anyone. I drove to Hampton Tuesday night to stay with my husband's family, and waited Wednesday morning to hear from someone at BCDSS. I didn't hear from anyone. I drove to Barnwell to visit the office. Ms. Jerkins was supervising a visit, and wasn't able to speak to me for very long. I asked her what it would take to be able to discuss the specifics of the case with me. She said that she could discuss the case in front of Katie with me, and she gave me a couple of other

scenarios where she could discuss the case with me. I told her that I spoke with Melinda Ray Hutto (current caregiver of Kinlee and Juleigh). She also suggested that I complete a background check. However, she pointed out that even if our background checks were clear and we were able to supervise the children, a clear background check didn't mean that Tommy and I would be able to supervise Katie with the children. I completed a background check form for my husband and me, and I turned them into the receptionist. I went to my mother's house in Barnwell after that, and spoke with Katie concerning the children and my visit with Ms. Jerkins. Katie was expecting a call from Ms. Jerkins about the case. I told Katie that Ms. Jerkins was supervising a visit, and that it would probably be best to go sit in the office and wait to speak to Ms. Jerkins personally. She and I returned to BCDSS shortly before noon. We sat in the lobby for quite some time before Ms. Jerkins was able to come out and speak to us. When she did come out to get us, Ms. Jerkins told Katie that if she took up too much of her time, she wouldn't be able to run the background checks...and Mrs. Jerkins said she knew that was what Katie wanted. Ms. Jerkins escorted us to her office. Mrs. Jerkins asked Katie if she gave permission to discuss the case in front of me, and Katie indicated that she gave permission. Ms. Jerkins gave me a brief report of the case up to that point. I discussed my observations over the past six years of the relationship between William (Bill) Ray (the father of the children) and Katie. Ms. Jerkins indicated that the children could be in the custody of their father as long as his current wife (Amanda Rudd Ray) because it was alleged she committed various forms of child abuse when my nieces and nephews were in her care last year. I indicated to Ms. Jerkins that Kinlee spoke of two incidents, Melinda and Misty Sanders Adkinson (current caregiver of Colton Pigman) told me about several incidents, and that Bill had spoken to my mother and sister about some incidents. Ms. Jerkins said they couldn't take statements such as those into account. However, she said they would be conducting a forensic interview with the children

during the week following Thanksgiving. If nothing came of the interview, the children would be allowed to be around Amanda without supervision. I expressed great concern about that possibility. I also expressed concern about the possibility of Bill allowing Amanda to be around the children without the supervision of Misty or Melinda. Katie indicated that she had been told by several people that the children were around Amanda without the supervision of Misty or Melinda. Ms. Jerkins basically stopped her mid-sentence to tell her that if she felt like the children were in enough danger to cause her to go out to Bill's house to see if they were around Amanda, then she would have no choice but to put them in foster care. Katie retracted her plea for help to make sure the children were safe. I felt that Ms. Jerkins was threatening Katie at this point. My understanding of the message that Ms. Jerkins was sending was that if Katie didn't go along with what was going on, the children would be removed from their current caregivers and placed in foster care. Katie wasn't indicating that Melinda or Misty were doing something outside of the guidelines. She was indicating that Bill was not conducting himself within the guidelines by allowing Amanda to be with the children. Katie also expressed concern that Juleigh's name was being changed to AnnaGrace. Ms. Jerkins indicated that was trivial, and they had to concern themselves with more pressing items. During the afternoon, I told Ms. Jerkins that I realized that Katie had done things she shouldn't have done. Katie has made choices that I didn't agree with, choices that I have not made, and choices that I don't think I would make if I were in the same situation. However, it was very curious to me that Bill seems to be put up on this pedestal. I told her that Katie and Bill were originally attracted to each other because they were alike in their habits. She said she understood that was probably true. She said that even though she thought there may be that possibility, she couldn't request that he be drug tested because she had no reason to believe that he was a drug user by any other statements but ours. It would have to be verified by someone else outside of

the Pigman family. I also told her that even though I didn't know Amanda, I felt like she and Bill were attracted to each other because they had similar habits as well. I also told Ms. Jerkins that Bill failed his drug test in May of 2012 when Katie had passed hers. She said she had no record of that and couldn't use it against him. I also told Ms. Jerkins that I knew enough about Bill to know that if he knew he would never have to pay child support for the children, that he would not be concerned about them at this point. For Bill, everything comes down to money. He has money to go out and party. However, he doesn't have the money to support his children and be genuinely concerned about their well-being. Since he and Amanda have gotten back together, he has suddenly retracted all statements of her abuse. I believe in my heart he is lying. I believe that Bill wants Amanda back with him so that he doesn't have to pay child support and/or alimony to her. I believe that he will do anything to keep from having to pay her money.

Near the end of our visit, I met Ms. Cave. She indicated that she would come to Anderson to complete a home visit. I told Ms. Cave and Ms. Jerkins that it was a three hour drive to Anderson. I asked if it would be easier to have the Anderson office complete the visit. Ms. Jerkins said they like to do their own visits on their own cases. I told Ms. Jerkins that I would contact her on Monday. She said that Ms. Cave would be the one that I would need to contact. I asked if I could contact them by email. Ms. Jerkins said that she isn't punctual when reading her email. She said that she scans it to see if there are emails from her supervisor, and those are the emails that she puts in priority. She often didn't read others until later. At this point Ms. Jerkins had decided that she would allow me to supervise Katie with the children. She completed a safety plan that stated that Tommy and I could supervise the children and that I could supervise the children around Katie. Ms. Jerkins called Melinda and told her that. I picked the children up shortly after 9:00 am on Friday, November 28th, Misty came to pick up Colton about 7:00 pm to go back to Savannah. I kept the girls until about 9:30 pm.

I was unable to contact BCDSS Monday because I was very busy after being off for a long weekend. I emailed Ms. Cave Monday morning around 9:00. However, it was returned to me because I sent it to the wrong email address. I resent the email to the correct email address around 2:30 pm on December 2nd. I did not hear back from Ms. Cave. Therefore, I forwarded the original email to Ms. Jerkins and Ms. Cave on December 8th. At 9:13 on December 10th, Ms. Cave replied to only me saying that she would like to visit my home on Friday, December 19th. At 9:41 she replied to only me again saying that the 19th wouldn't work, and that she would like to come on the 22nd. Ms. Jerkins replied to Ms. Cave and me at 12:03 pm on December 10th stating they would contact Anderson's DSS office to schedule someone to assess my home. I was confused since I had just received an email from Ms. Cave. I replied all saying that we were planning to be in Barnwell on the 22nd, and that I would like to see if we could schedule something with the Anderson office as Ms. Jerkins had suggested. I didn't get a reply. On December 15th at 8:51 am I replied all saying that my family had a change of plans. We were planning on being in town on the 22nd, and I asked if someone could get back to me to let me know what time someone would be coming to visit my home. Ms. Jerkins responded on December 16th at 11:22 am saying that she would have to get with Ms. Cave to see if she would still be able to come on the 22nd. Since Ms. Jerkins indicated that she wasn't diligent checking her email, I called and left voicemails for her and Ms. Cave most times that I sent emails.

According to Katie, she saw Ms. Cave Thursday night, December 18th at Melinda's restaurant. During the discussion with Ms. Cave, I sent Katie a text message saying that I had not heard from Ms. Jerkins or Ms. Cave. Katie mentioned that to Ms. Cave. Ms. Cave said that she had gotten the email from me and would return my email as soon as she got back into the office. I am not certain of the time of their discussion. However, I sent the text to Katie at 5:19 pm. Apparently Ms. Cave asked how it took to get to Anderson, and Katie told her 3 hours. Ms.

Cave couldn't believe it was a three hour drive. She was shocked and said it would take all day. She said she would contact the Anderson office to schedule a visit. I was shocked she didn't know how far it was since I told her on November 26th how far it was.

I waited to hear from Ms. Cave on Friday, and I didn't hear from her before I left school. I checked my email that evening, and Ms. Cave sent me an email at 4:01 pm saying that Ashley Jordan was going to conduct an alternative caregiver visit on December 22nd. After checking my other email account, I found an email from Ms. Jerkins at 9:33 am December 19th. I can't check my gmail account while I am working. So I didn't see this email until I got home.

I contacted the Anderson County Office of Department of Social Services Monday, December 22nd at 8:30. I was able to leave a voicemail for Ms. Jordan requesting her to contact me to let me know what time she would be coming by so I could make sure I was home. I also emailed her at 9:23. She was busy, and she was unable to contact me to schedule a time. However, she replied to my email at 1:40 pm. She and Kellie Wynn were able to stop by on their way back to the office while they were out in the field. They came after 3 pm, and stayed about 20 minutes. I completed some paperwork, and they completed paperwork. Ms. Jordan and Ms. Wynn said they would fax the paperwork to the Barnwell office as soon as they got back to their office. I expressed my thankfulness that they were able to come by despite have a heavy caseload themselves.

On Tuesday, I waited to hear from the Barnwell office regarding approval of supervising the children overnight. I had not heard from anyone from the Barnwell office. So I emailed Ms. Cave and Ms. Jerkins at 11:55 am on December 23rd. In the email I explained that Melinda would like for me to pick up Kinlee and Juleigh on the 26th to keep until January 2nd. I explained to the ladies that Melinda told me two weeks earlier that Ms. Cave told her that I could have the children over the break. I explained that wasn't willing to keep the children over night without written

approval because the paperwork that I had stated the children had to be returned to Melinda at night. I called Ms. Cave and Ms. Jerkins to leave a voicemail requesting they check their emails. I also contacted Melinda and Katie to tell them that I hadn't received paperwork, couldn't get in touch with Ms. Cave or Ms. Jerkins by phone, and that I had sent the email. Melinda said that spoke with Ms. Jerkins by phone, and that Ms. Jerkins said that the Barnwell office hadn't received the paperwork from the Anderson office. Katie told me that she had spoken with the receptionist at the Barnwell office during the afternoon of the 22nd to find out if paperwork had been faxed from the Anderson office. According to Katie, the receptionist confirmed there was paperwork faxed from the Anderson office regarding Katie's case. However, the receptionist said she couldn't confirm details of the paperwork. Katie and Melinda were apparently trying to contact Ms. Jerkins to let her know that according to the receptionist, the paperwork was faxed to their office the previous day. During this time, I emailed Ms. Jordan and Ms. Wynn from the Anderson office (at 1:23 pm) requesting them to re-fax the paperwork to the Barnwell office because the paperwork had gotten lost. Ms. Jordan replied to my email at 1:30 pm telling me she would fax the paperwork as soon she got back into the office. At 2:36 pm Ms. Wynn emailed me to tell me she emailed the Barnwell office to tell them the home was very appropriate, there were no concerns for the child's safety, and she would re-fax the paperwork once Ms. Jordan was back in the office. I received an email from Ms. Jerkins at 2:54 pm asking me to accept the email as written notification that the children may spend the night with me at my home. I then received a second email at 2:55 pm clarifying that the approval was for overnight visit and not for the children to be placed. In my email and voicemail to Ms. Cave and Ms. Jerkins, I provided them with a fax number to fax paperwork as well. I have yet to receive actual paperwork stating I can have the children for visits. Had one of the children gotten sick while they were in my care, I am not sure how I would have gotten treatment for them.

Today, Melinda Hutto was notified by Ms. Cave there would be a meeting on February 11th with all parties involved in the care of the children. Apparently Ms. Cave indicated to Melinda that it is the desire of DSS to place the children back into the care of Bill and Amanda. Melinda, Misty, and Katie were very upset about this information. Katie would like for the children to remain where they are until she gets out of rehab because that is the only place that any of us feel the children would be safe. It is rumored that Bill failed a drug test. If that is true, then I do not understand how he is considered suitable to have custody of the children, and I don't understand why he isn't being required to seek treatment for his drug use. Also, according to Ms. Cave nothing was proven during the forensic interview that was completed with the children. Bill took the children to the forensic interview appointment. Kinlee indicated that she was instructed to not saying anything bad about Amanda or she would be in trouble. When Katie brought this up to Ms. Cave, Ms. Cave quoted guidelines to her saying that the only person that couldn't take them to the forensic interview was the accused. There are too many unanswered problems in this situation that would indicate the children are safe living in the home and being cared for by Amanda and Bill.

Also, I am confused as to why I wasn't considered for placement of the children in the first place. According to my sister, Ms. Jerkins and Ms. Cave were told that I could take one or more of the children. However, she was told that they couldn't come to my house because I lived in Anderson. That is confusing to me because Colton is in the care of his cousin that lives in Savannah, GA. I would think it would be easier to place children in the same state rather than states other than SC. I want to clarify that I think that the children are being cared for extremely well in the homes where they currently reside. However, I feel there is a bias against Katie's family members that has no merit.

As an educator that deals with children and families on a daily basis, I am shocked at the lack of communication I have

received from this office. At the very least, this home visit needed to occur so that I could have the children visit and spend the night at my home. At the most, I needed this home visit in case I need to take temporary custody of Kinlee. I simply wanted an answer. If the Barnwell office conducts their other cases like this, I do not understand how they can be assured of the safety and well-being of the children in their care. In most professions a lack of communication such as this would result in reprimands or loss of jobs. I am convinced that the only reason I was contacted by Ms. Cave on Friday was because Katie indicated that she was going to speak to her attorney on Friday. I believe that if Katie hadn't mentioned that to Ms. Cave, I would still be waiting to hear from her.

Anderson office got this request on Friday, and they were able to squeeze it into an incredibly busy schedule. I do not understand why BCDSS has delayed so much regarding this visit.

According to South Carolina's DSS website, one of their purposes is: "Recognizing that Child Protective and Preventive Services are child centered and family focused. They are designed to ensure that reasonable efforts are made to maintain children safely in their own home, to reunite the family as soon as possible if removal of a child or parent is necessary, and to assure permanency in an adoptive home or other permanent situation if parental rights must be terminated." This purpose cannot be fulfilled with the lack of communication that goes on in this office. If BCDSS officers were communicating with Katie on a regular basis, I don't think she would be at this point. They tell her and my mother they are going to visit, and they don't come. In fact, weeks go by without a visit. In order to provide families with adequate services, communication should be improved greatly. However, their actions must improve as well.

Sincerely,

Carmen Elkins

