

17 September 2015

To whom it may concern,

I write this letter as a South Carolina citizen and military veteran with a number of concerns about the Department of Social Services. I specifically have concerns about the foster care system and the process of evaluating individuals interested in the process of becoming a home for a child dealing with abuse or neglect.

Until today, I did not know "exactly" what the "basis" of the Department of Social Services was.

The website for the South Carolina Department of Social Services states:

DSS is **required by state law** to identify **children** and vulnerable adults who have been or who may be **abused or neglected by their parents, guardians, caretakers or other relatives**. DSS provides services to help children remain safely in their own homes when possible **or** to be placed in foster care **when the home cannot be made safe** and to help vulnerable/elderly adults to have their needs met in the least restrictive environment.

IF the child or children are identified, they have been placed in foster care and the parent or parents **have not** been able to fulfill the requests of the court (multiple times), why is that child not kept in or returned to the same foster home and why are that parent or parent's rights not automatically terminated? I do not claim to know how this system works, so that is why I am asking the questions.

Why is it so hard for a person new to the system to adopt or foster, but foster parents that are blatantly doing it for the money and have multiple children in the home continue to get more children? People whose homes **ONLY** get cleaned when there is an impending visit can always get another child. Are these children being shown love and affection?

Looking on the website, I also came across the meaning of Child Protective and Preventive Services.

The website states:

The purpose of Child Protective and Preventive Services are offered to families by the South Carolina Department of Social Services which is **mandated by law to protect children from abuse or neglect within their families, in foster care, or by persons responsible for the child's welfare as defined by statute.** Services are provided to strengthen families; to enable children to remain safe in the home; **to temporarily remove from parental custody a child who is at imminent risk of harm; or to pursue termination of parental rights and assure the child permanency in a substitute family if the custodial family cannot be preserved without serious risk to the child.** Primary elements of this mission include:

1. Providing services intended to minimize harm to children and maximize the ability of families to protect and care for their own children.
2. Providing services for children and their families on the principle that the best child welfare is good family welfare.
3. Assessing allegations of abuse or neglect of children to determine if they are in need of protection. Where abuse or neglect is substantiated, these services should assure the support necessary to enable adequate family functioning or **to intervene to protect children until parents are able to do so.**
4. 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.

My understanding of Child Protective Services is that if the family can be maintained, that is first and foremost. **IF** there is definitive (documented) proof of abuse and or neglect and the child has been removed from the home, why would this system work to put the child **BACK** in the home (with its birth parents) if this is where the abuse and or neglect took place? This makes no sense at all to me. There have been multiple incidences of this, as well as unnecessary deaths, happening and being reported on the news. Are there unnecessary deaths, we the community, do not know about? I believe we are entitled to know what is going on with the children in our state.


What is being done to ensure notifications or calls about abuse and neglect are confirmed and taken care of in a timely manner; and appropriately?

IF a child or children have been removed from the home, placed in foster care and is or are thriving; there is noted, documented improvement in the child or children's quality of life and the parent or parents have not complied with the necessary court appointed classes or requirements in the allotted amount of time, are the parent or parent's rights automatically terminated? If not, why not?

How available are caseworkers to adoptive/foster parents? How honest are caseworkers with foster/adoptive parents? Is there a caseworker per case?

For example, I am a foster parent. Does the caseworker represent me and the child I am fostering? Are there any other individuals I interact with during the adoption process?

I would appreciate it if a "live" person would respond to me and I not be sent a "canned" response. I thank you in advance for a response.

Respectfully,

Alvina L. Ladson