

M. Elizabeth Ralston  
2629 Ion Ave  
Sullivans Island,  
S.C., 29482

September 3, 2016

To The Honorable Richard M Gergel

Dear Judge Gergel,

I am writing regarding the settlement agreement involving the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS). I have worked as a mental health professional in a number of positions in Charleston SC for forty years. Prior to my retirement I served as the founding director of The Dee Norton Lowcountry Children's Center, (DNLCC) an accredited Children's Advocacy Center in Charleston, SC. Since retiring I have served as a Co-director of Project BEST, an effort by DNLCC and the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina, to implement evidence based mental health treatment across the state for traumatized children served by the SCDSS and by the South Carolina Department of Mental Health. In all of these positions I worked closely with SCDSS in response to children and families experiencing child abuse.

I am writing today to urge approval of the settlement related to the lawsuit brought against SCDSS. I believe that one of the most important conditions for change to occur that improves outcomes for the children and families served by SCDSS will be the approval of this settlement that will provide technical assistance from the monitors to help SCDSS actually implement the changes outlined in this agreement. In addition, I believe that the required monitoring is critical to ensure fidelity to the implemented changes required in this settlement agreement. I am hopeful that the actual implementation and monitoring of this settlement can be a starting place for this agency as it works to implement practice changes to improve services and outcomes to the children and families they serve.

There are many very good people who work for SCDSS who are committed to improving services and outcomes for their clients. I am hopeful that through this settlement agreement SCDSS leadership will get the technical assistance and monitoring necessary for success. In addition, I am hopeful that the implementation and monitoring of this agreement can be a beginning for the establishment of a new culture within this agency. A culture that has a vision for their staff and for the children and families they serve; a culture that is informed by research and powered by a workforce that is trained to competency in their responsibilities; and a culture that provides their staff with clear practice guidelines regarding their responsibilities and the support needed to deal with the traumatic nature of their work.

Your approval of this agreement can be a step to the change of practice and of culture within SCDSS that could ultimately improve the lives of both clients and staff of SCDSS as well as the success of the agency.

Thank you for the role you have and are playing in this important work.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "M. Elizabeth Ralston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Elizabeth" being more prominent than the last name "Ralston".

M. Elizabeth Ralston, Ph. D.