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Sources: Feds Probing DSS; Cover-Up Alleged

By [Porter Barron Jr.](#)

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Free Times has uncovered two major revelations in the controversy surrounding the state's child welfare agency: First, that staffers for Gov. Nikki Haley asked Republican senators to soft-pedal their investigation of the Department of Social Services so as not to make the governor look bad; and second, that federal investigators are looking into allegations against the agency.

Gov. Nikki Haley last week professed again her confidence in Lillian Koller, the embattled director of the Department of Social Services, whose tenure has been marked by a high number of child fatalities in cases associated with Child Protective Services, an alleged policy of outsourcing child welfare cases in an effort to improve the bureau's statistics, a staggering rate of employee turnover and an apparent disdain for transparency. But that confidence might not be shared by Haley's staff, at least not by Chief of Staff Ted Pitts and Director of Legislative Affairs Katherine Veldran, who several legislative sources say admonished Republican senators against making the governor look bad with their probe into the agency.

According to those well-placed sources, the Haley staffers met with Republican senators on a subcommittee investigating Child Protective Services in the wake of their first hearing in October. Pitts and Veldran allegedly told Senators Katrina Shealy and Tom Young to avoid embarrassing Haley or hurting her chances of re-election in the course of their hearings. (Democratic Sen. Joel Lourie is the third member of the subcommittee.)

The sources say the Haley camp is acutely aware that Democrats backing her opponent Sen. Vincent Sheheen (D-Kershaw) are pushing a narrative of first-term incompetency in the Haley administration — cataloging cabinet agency controversies such as the massive taxpayer data breach at the Department of Revenue and the bungled response to a tuberculosis outbreak in Greenwood County by the Department of Health and Environmental Control — and is set against allowing Democrats any more ammunition.

Reached for comment, Shealy said, "Nobody in the state of South Carolina is a bigger supporter of Nikki Haley than I am. This has nothing to do with politics. We've got to find out what the problem is with the Department of Social Services."

"It needs to come from the top, which I would think would be the director of the agency, but if she's not going to answer questions, somebody has to," Shealy says, addressing the enduring lack of answers coming from DSS.

But things aren't so rosy from where the senators on the subcommittee sit. In late January, Lourie told Free Times, "Since the hearings began, Sen. Shealy and I've been inundated with families, former DSS employees and even current employees who are calling to say, 'Y'all are on the right track. Keep it up.'"

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