



**Montessori Early Learning Center**  
*and School of the Arts*



May 18, 2015

Dear Governor Haley,

I am not sure where to direct this letter so I thought I would start with you. I have been a school principal of a small private school for over thirty-eight years. During this time I have been involved with many court appointed guardians in the South Carolina family court system involving children caught in divorce, neglect, abuse, etc. There has been a great disparity in the cases with the degree of effort and dedication in these guardians. It became apparent to me, that many guardians that are court appointed will collect the retainer and just wait for a year to see if "things would settle."

I have served as a volunteer guardian in the past, with a focus on deaf children, and the FIRST place I always visited was the school. It amazes me that many guardians do not visit the school or interview teachers who have daily contact with the child and family.

Recently, I have had the pleasure of working with two guardians who, in my opinion, went the extra mile to ensure the safety and well-being of the children appointed to their care. Christine Hardee and Kathryn Free impressed me as being exemplary. These women (in different cases) made multiple visits to the school and interviewed me as well as teachers and staff who had contact with the children. They both made visits to talk to the children privately while they were at school and Kathryn even gave her personal cell phone number to a set of "at-risk" twins to use anytime they were frightened, hungry, or just wanted to talk. I was amazed at the immediate and in-depth investigations exhibited by both of these attorneys. They set the bar for all guardians in my opinion and speak well for our state.

In this day and age when our court system can be overwhelmed and unfortunate mistakes made, there are guardian angels out there who are diligent and try to keep our children safe. I just wanted to tell you that.

Sincerely,

Ina Lightner-Fort

CC: Senator John Courson  
Representative Todd Rutherford  
The Honorable Justice Kaye Hearn  
The Honorable Judge Dorothy Jones  
The Honorable Judge J. Michelle Childs  
Kathryn Free, Attorney at Law  
Christine Hardee, Attorney at Law