



Division of Children & Family Services

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September 15, 2025

Prosecutor David Ethredge
14th Judicial District
301 E. 6th St., Suite 170
Mountain Home, AR 72653

Dear Prosecutor Ethredge,

There has been significant interest in a child maltreatment case in Baxter County last year in which two offenders now face criminal charges. I want to take the opportunity to address some of the concerns that have been raised about the Arkansas Department of Human Services' involvement in this case, and the subsequent actions we have taken to ensure that we learn from our mistakes and apply those lessons throughout the agency as we strive to do everything we can to protect vulnerable children.

It is unacceptable that there were more than two dozen reports accepted for investigation to the Child Abuse Hotline related to this family that were deemed unsubstantiated by our investigators when we now know there was severe abuse occurring. We have conducted a thorough review of each of these reports as part of our efforts to better understand what occurred, and how we can improve our practices going forward. Though there are mitigating circumstances related to many of these reports, and while some of them were appropriately closed based on the facts and statements available at the time, it is a failure on our part that each report was not fully considered within the context of the growing number of complaints. This pattern of maltreatment calls into the system should have triggered a more thorough response with increased scrutiny that ultimately could have resulted in a better outcome.

I'm grateful that my team within the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has taken steps to investigate this case and to address the issues that occurred so that they won't happen again. Division leadership and staff met to outline the full history of this case, though it is relevant to note that many of these issues date back more than ten years and involve staff who no longer work for the agency. However, we have determined that additional emphasis on reviewing prior agency history in all cases is a necessary focus going forward. This is a key element of Safety Organized Practice (SOP) standards, which are now in place across all investigatory units within DCFS. SOP standards require a full history check as part of an initial safety assessment in any child maltreatment investigation, and they include a team approach to bring investigators and families together to determine best next steps for a child. If these new

standards had been followed in the Baxter County case, there very likely would have been a different, better, and earlier outcome.

DCFS is also continuing to participate in the Multi-Disciplinary Team approach that brings other partners and stakeholders into the fold to best support abuse and neglect investigations. Since this case occurred, they have held training sessions in every region of the state to ensure best practices are being followed for more thoroughly assessing child safety, completing quality investigations, and adhering to the SOP standards.

I also want to address another area of confusion that we should have handled differently. In our initial meeting with you, DHS referenced a report that would detail the shortcomings of this case. This is a departure from how child maltreatment cases are typically handled, and it was a mistake to suggest that DHS could publicly release a non-standard report that included specifics about this case. Child maltreatment investigations are confidential under state law, and it is simply not possible to release the details of these investigations. While we cannot share the child maltreatment investigation publicly, we can provide these records to law enforcement and your office. It is possible to speak broadly about the failures in this case and the ways we have committed to making our division better as a result, and it's my hope that this letter helps achieve that for you and for the public who is rightly concerned about how a child could be failed by the system.

Above all, I want to be clear about our involvement with this family: we fell short of our mission and our responsibilities. If we fail even one child of the thousands we serve every year, it's one too many, and we will do everything in our power to prevent this from ever happening again. We are fully committed to being there for children and families in need, and we look forward to always being better tomorrow than we are today.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tiffany Wright". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tiffany" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Wright".

Tiffany Wright
Director, Division of Children and Family Services
Arkansas Department of Human Services