

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In the Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM DORCHESTER COUNTY
Court of Common Pleas

Maite Murphy, Circuit Court Judge

Circuit Court Case Number 2017-CP-18-02001

Kaci May and Kaci May as guardian
ad litem for A.R.M., J.H.M., J.T.M.,
C.B.M., J.R.M., and J.W.M.,

Appellants,

v.

Dorchester School District Two,
South Carolina Department of Social
Services, Michael Leach, and Jasmine
Flemister.

Respondents,

INITIAL BRIEF OF APPELLANTS

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SC Court of Appeals

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Statement of Issues on Appeal

- I. The trial court erred in finding the Appellants did not establish a likelihood of success on the merits.**
- II. The trial court erred in finding that S.C. Code Ann. §63-7-920 was not limited by the Plaintiffs' constitutional protections under Amend. I, IV, V, VI, and XIV of the U.S. Const. and S.C. Const. art. I, §§3 10, and 12.**
- III. The trial court erred in finding the Appellants failed to show irreparable harm.**
- IV. The trial court erred in finding the Appellants would have adequate remedy at law for harm from future interrogations.**

Statement of the Case

We address unrestricted government intrusion into the lives of South Carolina's children and families. SCDSS's policies and procedures use compulsory schooling to skirt children's and families' constitutional protections, even after affirmative assertions of such rights.

The South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) and our public schools allow SCDSS's caseworkers unfettered access and interrogation of the children of South Carolina. They do not require parental permission, exigent circumstances, a warrant, or a court order before interrogations are conducted. Rarely do SCDSS or the public schools inform parents of such interrogations after they occur. SCDSS and our public schools rely upon S.C. Code Ann. §63-7-920 to disregard parents' and children's First, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights under the United States Constitution and rights under §§ 3, 10, and 12 of Article I of the South Carolina Constitution.

After a report of abuse and neglect was made against Kaci May, SCDSS interrogated the May children at Dorchester School District Two (School District) schools without parental consent, a warrant, or a court order seven times over the course of nine months. There were no exigent circumstances to justify these interrogations.

Appellants, who attend public schools/will attend public schools, asked the Court to protect their constitutional rights and enjoin SCDSS and School District from interrogating the May children in the future unless SCDSS has parental permission, exigent circumstances are present, or a warrant or court order is obtained. Appellants asked the trial court to restrain SCDSS Defendants from interrogating the children unless there is a court order or a new allegation of abuse and/or neglect and also restrain School District from facilitating interrogation of the children unless there is a court order or a new allegation of abuse and/or neglect.

Relevant Facts

I. The May Family.

Warren May, father of the minor Appellants, passed away during litigation on April 16, 2020. Kaci May (Kaci) is the biological mother of A.R.M., J.T.M., C.B.M., and J.W.M. Trans., *5, 58-59 (Aug. 12, 2020). Kaci is adoptive mother of J.H.M., J.R.M., and L.C.M. and they were adopted from SCDSS foster care on June 5, 2015. Trans., *5, 58-59, 72 (Aug. 12, 2020).

The following table may assist the Court in sorting out the May children:

May Children on March 26, 2017				May Children on August 22, 2017		
Initials	Age	Grade	School	Age	Grade	School
JTM¶	11	5	SHES	11	6	GMS
JHM*	10	3	SHES	10	4	SHES
CBM¶	9	3	SHES	9	4	SHES
JRM*	7	1	SHES	8	2	SHES
ARM¶	7	1	SHES	7	2	SHES
JWM¶	4	-	-	5	K	SHES
LCM*	4	-	-	4	-	-

***= Adopted and ¶ = Kaci May and Warren May are the Biological Parents
SHES = Sand Hill Elementary School; GMS = Gregg Middle School**

Trans., *58-60 (Aug. 12, 2020)

a. Background.

J.H.M. and J.R.M. suffered severe sexual abuse, physical abuse, and neglect before being placed in the Mays' home. Trans., *6-15 (Aug. 12, 2020).

J.H.M. received treatment through MUSC's National Crime Victim Center. Trans., 6 (Aug. 12, 2020). J.R.M. "...is diagnosed with reactive attachment disorder". Trans., *7 (Aug. 12, 2020). J.R.M.'s behaviors include, "[l]ying, cheating, stealing, manipulating people, killing animals." Trans., *8 (Aug. 12, 2020). "[H]e has threatened many people's lives repeatedly..." and demonstrated "significant sexual behavioral problems" while placed at a residential treatment facility. Trans., *8 (Aug. 12, 2020).

J.H.M., J.R.M., and L.C.M., have been in therapy since foster care. Trans., *9 (Aug. 12,

2020). J.T.M., C.B.M., A.R.M., and J.W.M. engaged in therapy later. Trans., *9-10 (Aug. 12, 2020).

Due to the children's prior abuse issues, the Mays learned they had to take precautions.

Trans., *6; 8 (Aug. 12, 2020). Kaci may testified:

...[W]e are all hypervigilant and over the years we have learned the need for open communication constantly. Strategy called, "Name it to tame it." So we identify behaviors exactly as they are. The purpose and functions of the behaviors. Everybody in the home as to practice that.

We have extensive rules about who can be where and when they can be there and what they can be doing. And they're signed by everybody in the house, posted all over the doors. We have alarms on almost every single door in our house. We have cameras inside our house, outside our house. We have motion detectors. I've slept on the floor outside of J.H.M.'s door many, many nights or just sat there because I couldn't sleep so I sat all night outside her door.

LCM and J.W.M. are our two youngest children. And they've spent most of their lives sleeping in our bedroom for their protection.

Trans., *8-9 (Aug. 12, 2020). Because J.H.M., J.R.M., and L.C.M. sexually act out, the children's Fifth Amendment Right to remain silent be protected. Trans., *26 (Aug. 12, 2020).

Kaci is also concerned because SCDSS has caused harm by allowing the adopted children to be sexually abused while in foster care. Trans., *26 (Aug. 12, 2020).

b. J.H.M.'s sexual behaviors.

Kaci was concerned J.H.M. would sexually act out on other children while at school because of J.H.M.'s a history of sexual behavior problems inside the school, on the school bus, and in the community. Trans., *14, 23, (Aug. 12, 2020); Trans., *79-85 (Aug. 11, 2020). The Mays could not get the School District to take J.H.M.'s behaviors seriously. Trans., *14, 80 (Aug. 12, 2020); Trans., *82-85 (Aug. 11, 2020).

At a meeting before school opened in fall of 2016, Kaci informed Principal Wally Baird of J.H.M.'s sexual behaviors problems. Trans., *14-15 (Aug. 12, 2020); Trans., *116-119 (Aug.

11, 2020). Kaci shared an email from the school bus driver regarding the sexual incident. Trans., *119 (Aug. 11, 2020). The school bus driver was physically present at the new school during the meeting and Baird chose not to speak with him to confirm the information. Trans., *119 (Aug. 11, 2020). Kaci expressed she was fearful of an increase of sexual behaviors and she needed the school to be vigilant. Trans., *15 (Aug. 12, 2020).

c. Fall 2016 SCDSS Intake.

J.H.M. reported to the school that her mother threw a toy and hit her. Trans., *13 (Aug. 12, 2020); Trans., *56 (Aug. 11, 2020). A report was made to SCDSS.¹ Trans., *13 (Aug. 12, 2020). SCDSS dispatched a child protective services contractor to “interview me and talk to me. I refused services at that point because they had nothing to offer that we didn’t already have in place.” Trans., *13 (Aug. 12, 2020); Trans., *53 (Aug. 11, 2020). The investigation was unfounded. Trans., *14 (Aug. 12, 2020).

d. Spring 2017 IEP Meeting, SCDSS intake and investigation.

Sand Hill Elementary School held a meeting with Kaci on March 27, 2017 to discuss the provision of educational services to J.H.M. and J.R.M. and the other children. Trans., *95-99 (Aug. 11, 2020); Trans., *111-113 (Aug. 11, 2020). The School District had a history of ignoring Kaci’s concerns. Trans., *23 (Aug. 12, 2020). The meeting was contentious. Kaci was concerned the school was endangering J.H.M. and other children by not supervising J.H.M. After several explanations, Kaci used terms like “rape” regarding J.H.M.’s behaviors to drive home the dangers of the sexual conduct. Trans., *115 (Aug. 11, 2020); Trans., *51, 84-86 (Aug. 12, 2020).

The next day, on March 28, 2017, a School District employee made a report to SCDSS. Plt. Tr. Ex. 3, Intake, *5 (Aug. 11, 2020). The following was reported:

¹ Although Kaci testified the school made the report, the origin of the report (1) was statutorily confidential pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. §63-7-330 and 1990; (2) was not relevant to Plaintiffs’

It is reported that the children have been “brutally” raped by J.H.M., age 9 yrs. R[eporter]/S[tates] that J.H.M. “sucked J.T.M.’s penis” R/S the children are not safe in the home. R/S J.R.M. and J.H.M. need supervision at all times. R/S that all the children in the home were sexually abused by J.R.M. and J.H.M. and that J.H.M. could be doing this with other children. R/S concerns that parents are not supervising children properly.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 3, Intake, *5 (Aug. 11, 2020). The intake was accepted, and an investigation was initiated by SCDSS. Plt. Tr. Ex. 3, Intake, *5 (Aug. 11, 2020). Part of the justification for accepting the intake was Kaci’s refusal to accept services from SCDSS in November, even though SCDSS knew services were in place. Plt. Tr. Ex. 3, Intake, *5 (Aug. 11, 2020)

School Resource Officer Deputy Pryor and Detective Blanchard interviewed J.H.M. on March 28, 2017 at the school. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, SCDSS Dictation, *1.

On March 29, 2017 at 1:00 p.m. SCDSS caseworkers Melissa Geathers and Priscilla King went to the school to interrogate the children. Plt. Tr. Ex. 2, School Sign-In Record, *1; Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *4; Trans., *113 (Aug. 11, 2020). J.H.M., J.T.M. and J.R.M. were not at school and Geathers and King met with A.R.M. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, SCDSS Dictation, *4. Geathers and King asked 7-year-old A.R.M. (1) who lived in the home, (2) whether she was afraid at home, (3) whether her swiblings ever feel afraid, (4) about drugs or alcohol in the home and (5) whether anyone had touched her private areas. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *4.

On March 30, 2017 at 1:00 p.m. SCDSS caseworkers Kerry Hullstrung and Vanessa Smalls went to Sandhill Elementary to interrogate the children.² Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *2; Plt. Tr. Ex. 2, School Sign-In Record, *2. Deputy Pryor told SCDSS he wanted to take J.H.M. into Emergency Protective Custody but there were no grounds. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *2.

claims and the Defendants’ defenses; and (3) was not substantiated.

² There is a discrepancy with the dates of the dictation in Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *1-4 and the school sign-in record, Plt. Tr. Ex. 2, School Sign-In Record, *1-2. But it appears the school sign-in record is more accurate as the two visits recorded in dictation do not appear to be contemporaneous as Geathers’ dictation states J.H.M., J.T.M., and J.R.M. were not present at

Hullstrung and Smalls met with C.B.M. and asked about (1) medical visits, (2) who lived in his home, (3) what he does with his family, (4) whether his parents abuse alcohol or drugs, (5) whether he was sexually abused, (6) whether he was spanked, (7) personal hygiene, (8) domestic violence in the home, (9) whether there is enough food, and (10) whether he was scared or worried about anything. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *2.

Hullstrung and Smalls next met with J.H.M., who asked that her mother be present at the meeting with the SCDSS caseworker. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *3.

CM met with J.H.M. next and had a difficult time completing the interview because she was unable to remain focused and was annoyed about the case managers presence in the room. Dept. Pryor stated that J.H.M. asked for her mother to be present prior to meeting with CM.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *3; Trans., *57 (Aug. 11, 2020). J.H.M. was asked about (1) her health, (2) the safety of the home, (3) medical visits, (4) who resided in the home, (5) whether there was enough food in the house, (6) whether she was spanked, and (7) whether she was being sexually abused. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *3. J.H.M. became angry when SCDSS began asking her about sexual abuse, stated, “if you want to talk about this I need my mom here” and then refused to further speak with the case worker. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *3.

Hullstrung and Smalls met with J.R.M. and he was asked about (1) adult supervision, (2) medical visits, (3) who lived in the house, (4) whether he is spanked, (5) domestic violence in the home, and (6) concerns or worries in the home. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *3.

On March 31, 2017 Hullstrung went to the May home. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *6. Kaci, “stated she has an attorney, and the case manager needs to speak with her.” Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *6. Kaci did not allow SCDSS to interview the children or enter her home. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *6; Trans., *80-81 (Aug. 12, 2020). J.H.M. hid under her bed because she was

school for interrogation.

afraid SCDSS was going to remove her. Trans., *28-29 (Aug. 12, 2020).

On April 5, 2017 Hullstrung and Supervisor Elliott Ray, III, conducted a Seven Day Staffing. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *7; Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing, *1-2. *See also* Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *17. SCDSS planned for its attorney to contact Kaci's attorney. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *7.

On April 24, 2017 Hullstrung and Ray conducted another staffing. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *8-9; Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing, *3-4. Hullstrung staffed the case with legal to meet with Kaci's attorney. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *8-9; Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing, *3-4. SCDSS recorded Kaci, "has reportedly quit her job and withdrawn [sic] the children so that she is able to homeschool them.", which was false. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *8-9; Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing, *3-4. The staffing recommended:

1. CW to await meeting schedule with client and attorney
2. CW to complete Inspection Warrant
3. CW to re-staff within 14 days

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *8-9; Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing, *4.

On May 1, 2017 Hullstrung emailed Kaci to schedule a home visit. Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-B, Emails, *4-5; Trans., *36-37 (Aug. 12, 2020). Kaci wanted to schedule on a Friday, "I was trying to stick to a weekend because our children had nightmares last time you visited our home." Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-B, Emails, *3. Hullstrung cancelled the visit to the home because, "...it causes the children to have nightmares..." Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-B, Emails, *2; Trans., *36-37 (Aug. 12, 2020). On May 3, 2017 Hullstrung asked Kaci to have her attorney schedule a meeting. "I will not be coming to the home at this time due to allegations you are bringing towards me causing the children nightmares when I come to your home." Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-B, Emails, *1.

On May 12, 2017 Hullstrung went to the school around 9:00 a.m. to interrogate the May

children, J.H.M., J.R.M., and A.R.M. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *12, Plt. Tr. Ex. 2, *3. A guidance counselor sat in on the interrogation. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *12. Hullstrung:

...“observed J.H.M. to have shoes on that have holes in them. J.H.M. was also wearing a mismatched outfit. J.R.M. and A.R.M. appeared put together with no holes and clothes that fit them and appeared to be clean.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *12. The information sought during the interview included family information on abuse, alcohol and drug use, discipline and disciplinary methods, mental health of family members, family history, finances, diet, physical health of family members, etc. Trans., *135-136 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *9, 17-18.

Later that day Hullstrung and Ray conducted a decisional staffing. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *10-11; Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing, *5-6. SCDSS recommended:

1. CW to Indicate case against mom & dad for Physical Neglect
2. CW to send [Determination] & [Right to Appeal] within 5 business days
3. CW to complete Investigative Summary & Child Safety
4. CW to prepare [Court Information Sheet] for court intervention
5. CW to prepare file for transfer to Family Preservation Unit

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *11; Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing, *5-6. SCDSS made a case decision indicating the Mays of physical neglect. Plt. Tr. Ex. 7, Determination Fact Sheets & Appeal, *1-4; Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing, *5-6. SCDSS wrote:

[SCDSS] responded to a report that the children have been brutally raped by J.H.M. Allegations that the children are not safe in the home. Concerns that parents are not supervising the children properly.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 7, Determination Fact Sheets & Appeal, *1-4. SCDSS also recorded:

Education contact was made at Sandhill Elementary. Home visit/safety inspected [sic] attempted. Law enforcement contacted.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 7, Determination Fact Sheets & Appeal, *1-4.

At this point, SCDSS’s investigation was complete. S.C. Code Ann. §63-7-920(A)(2).

Kaci testified that she instructed SCDSS to stop interrogating her children. Trans., *35 (Aug. 12,

2020) (I told everybody who had ears to stop speaking to my children.). SCDSS never sent a proposed treatment plan to Kaci. Trans., *52 (Aug. 12, 2020)

On May 25, 2017 Hullstrung visited the school at 10:15 and pulled J.T.M. and C.B.M. out of class to be interrogated. Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, School Sign-In Record, *4; Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *13. The information sought during the interview included family information on abuse, alcohol and drug use, discipline and disciplinary methods, mental health of family members, family history, finances, diet, physical health of family members, etc. Trans., *135-136 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *9, 17-18.

On June 1, 2017 SCDSS conducted a case staffing and transferred the case from Investigations to the Family Preservation Unit. Plt. Tr. Ex. 8, SCDSS Case Transfer; Trans., *166-167 (Aug. 11, 2020). SCDSS wrote:

Minor children are allegedly receiving services. mother will not sign release. CM [Case Manager] was unable to gain access to the home. CM is preparing paperwork.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 8, SCDSS Case Transfer and/or Case Staffing. Jasmine Flemister was assigned as the Family Preservation Case Manager for the May case. Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-A, Emails, *1-2.

On June 5, 2017 Flemister emailed Kaci and asked to speak to her and visit her home. Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-A, Emails, *1-2; Trans., *154 (Aug. 11, 2020). Kaci informed Flemister the family's attorney had not received a response from SCDSS and provided her attorneys' contact information to SCDSS. Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-A, Emails, *1-2.

On June 7, 2017 the May's appealed SCDSS's determination of physical neglect. Plt. Tr. Ex. 7, Determination Fact Sheet & Appeal, *6-7; Trans., *40 (Aug. 12, 2020).

On June 15, 2017 Dorchester County DSS Director conducted an interim review of the case, concluded the decision was supported by the evidence", and SCDSS would seek family

court intervention. Plt. Tr. Ex. 7, Determination Fact Sheet & Appeal, *5.

On June 17, 2017 SCDSS Case Manager Flemister ran into the May Family at Fort Dorchester High School after a performance. FCA Bates No. 004142. SCDSS noted:

CM spoke to the family and observed all the children. All the children stated they were fine. CM observed the children all dressed appropriately and free of marks and bruises. CM did not engage in full conversation due to the nature of the contact. CM will follow up with a home visit.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *14; Trans., *174 (Aug. 11, 2020).

On June 23, 2017 SCDSS's Office of Administrative Hearings issued an Order to Stay Appeal based upon SCDSS's intent to seek family court intervention. Plt. Tr. Ex. 7, Determination Fact Sheet & Appeal, *6-7.

On July 5, 2017 Flemister attempted to visit the May family at home. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *15; Trans., *154-155, 174 (Aug. 11, 2020). She wrote, "CM arrived at the address and no one answered the door. CM observed a van in the yard but no noise from the inside of the home." Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *15.

On July 14, 2017 Flemister attempted to visit the May residence:

Upon arrival CM observed a van in the yard. CM contacted Mrs. May's attorney's office while in the yard to obtain information for the family. The secretary at the office took my information and stated I would receive a call back. CM was able to obtain a number for Kaci May from a previous case in which she adopted children. CM made contact with Kaci May via telephone and informed her who she was and that she was at the home. Mrs. May stated that the CM was not to be at her home and that she needed to schedule any home visits with her family through her attorney CM left the May residence.

CM will follow up with legal and contact her attorney for a visit.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *16; Trans., *155 (Aug. 11, 2020).

On July 14, 2017 Flemister received an email from Kaci:

Good morning Jasmine.
It is my understanding you are at my home now. I want to make it clear again,

agree speaking with you a moment ago, that any visit to our home, we want scheduled through our attorney Ms Deborah Butcher. If you are having trouble contacting her, please let me know.

Best regards
Kaci May

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *16; Trans., *155 (Aug. 11, 2020).

From July 14, 2017 through July 26, 2017 there were several emails among Flemister, Kaci, and her attorney addressing SCDSS's desire to get into the May's home. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *18-23; Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-A, Emails, *3-7. On July 24, 2017 Flemister met with legal. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *19.

On July 31, 2017 Flemister contacted the sheriff's office to assist with conducting a face-to-face visit with the Mays. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *23; Trans., *155-156 (Aug. 11, 2020). The officer went to the home and no one was present. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *23.

Later that day, Flemister conducted a staffing with Juanita Bryant, a performance coach with SCDSS. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *25. Bryant documented that Flemister was only able to "meet with the children by going to their school." Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *25. Bryant wrote, "Children were interviewed once at school and they made no disclosures of abuse." Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *25. She listed as a Complicating Factor, "Mom is not allowing DSS to have access to her home." Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *25. Under "Next Steps", Bryant wrote:

CM Needs to contact the father through the military to hear his side of what goes on in his household from his knowledge.

-Contact law enforcement to do a wellness check again. This time to go with them to the home to be sure they have the right location.

-Send a letter to mom and her attorney stating that we have been trying to reach her to set up a visit to see if post office will provide a forwarding address if in fact she has moved.

-Make call to Region 3 Adoptions worker to see what background information she can tell you about the family.

-Continue to make diligent efforts to locate the family and correspond with mom's attorney and dad.

-Request authorization to obtain the children's therapy records and school

behavior records to thoroughly assess the behavior problems parent is alleging.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *26.

On August 2, 2017 SCDSS's attorney sent an email to Kaci's attorney providing dates to schedule a time for Flemister to meet with the children. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *27

On August 3, 2017 the May's filled out School Sign-Out Sheets for 2017-2018. Plt. Tr. Ex. 9, School District Sign-Out Sheets *1-5. At the bottom of each sheet, Warren May listed the phone numbers for Family Attorney Deborah Butcher and wrote the following:

Either Kaci May or Mrs. Butcher are to be contacted before anyone interviews [my child].

Plt. Tr. Ex. 9, School District Sign-Out Sheets *1-5; Trans., *67-68 (Aug. 11, 2020). Principal Baird disregarded the instructions because the School District needed, "a court order signed by a judge to make this happen" and never contacted the May's or their attorney when SCDSS interrogated the children. Trans., *68-69 (Aug. 11, 2020).

During the 2017-2018 school year, C.B.M., A.R.M., and J.W.M. were enrolled at Sand Hill Elementary School. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *37-38. J.T.M. attended Gregg Middle School. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *28.

On August 23, 2017 Flemister contacted Gregg Middle School about J.T.M. and spoke with the 6th grade principal. The principal had seen J.T.M. that day with his mother, the child was fine, and she had no concerns. Flemister wrote:

CM explained the current situation regarding the family and asked for her assistance if needed. She stated she would be willing to see if the child if needed and would be in contact with the CM.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *29; Trans., *174-175 (Aug. 11, 2020).

On August 24, 2017 Flemister received a call from Principal Baird, "...that he made face to face contact with the minor children and they are well. He stated there is nothing to report."

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *30.

From August 25, 2017 through August 28, 2017 Flemister, Kaci, and Deborah Butcher sent emails regarding a time to meet with the children. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *32-35; Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-A, Emails, *9-12; Trans., *175-177 (Aug. 11, 2020).

On August 28, 2017 Flemister requested a law enforcement escort to Kaci's home to see L.C.M. Flemister wrote:

...was met by Ofc. P. Owens to assist with the welfare check. Ofc. Owens followed the CM to the home to conduct the welfare check. CM observed no cars in the yard at the home. Ofc. Owens knocked on the door but there was no answer and he did not observe any movement in the home.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *31; Trans., *156 (Aug. 11, 2020).

On September 13 and 14, 2017 Kaci withdrew J.H.M. and J.R.M. from school and transferred them to Connections Academy because of the interrogations. Plt. Tr. Ex. 11, School Withdrawal, *1-2; Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *36; Trans., *47-48, 73 (Aug. 12, 2020).

On September 14, 2017 SCDSS filed a complaint in *SCDSS v. May*, 2017-DR-18-01334, in the family court alleging abuse and neglect against Kaci and Warren May and asking for custody of all seven of the May children. Plt. Tr. Ex. 12, Summons and Complaint, *SCDSS v. May*, 2017-DR-18-01334; Trans., *10 (Aug. 12, 2020).

SCDSS asked for the following relief, in part, from the Family Court:

(A) ***Legal and physical custody of the minor children***, J.T.M., J.H.M., L.C.M., J.R.M., J.W.M., C.B.M., A.R.M., be granted to the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS);

(B) The Court ***approve the Plaintiff's Treatment/Placement Plan*** or in the alternative, the Court should authorize Plaintiff to terminate or forego reasonable efforts to preserve the family or reunite the minor children, J.T.M., J.H.M., L.C.M., J.R.M., J.W.M., C.B.M., A.R.M., with Defendants, Kaci May and Warren May, pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. §63-7-1640;

...

(E) ***Defendants cooperate with Plaintiff to make appropriate plans for the minor children and to notify Plaintiff promptly of any change of condition and/or***

address;

(F) Plaintiff be granted full and complete access to all criminal, professional, school, medical, and other records of the minor children and of Defendants as may be necessary, including an order that Defendants execute necessary releases for such records when required by providers;

...

(H) The Court make a finding that the minor children are abused or neglected children as defined in §63-7-20 and the minor children cannot be protected from further harm without further services and possible removal;

Plt. Tr. Ex. 12, Complaint, *SCDSS v. May*, 2017-DR-18-01334 (Emphasis added).

Flemister filed a Court Information Sheet/Supplemental Report in support of SCDSS's Complaint. Plt. Tr. Ex. 12, Court Information Sheet, *11-14. Flemister and SCDSS alleged the following:

The children have not been permitted to complete forensic interviews to determine if services are needed. The Department has been denied access to the children and the home where they reside. The Department was not granted access to the minor children's medical or mental health records to confirm Ms. May's reports of trauma and services for the minor children. The parents have denied the Department visitation with the minor children and prohibited contact. Ms. May has reported that her children were upset and hid when the Department's investigators came to the home because she had taught them that if they were taken to a foster home that they would be raped...

Plt. Tr. Ex. 12, Court Information Sheet, *11-14. Flemister and SCDSS also alleged:

The Department has been unable to access the minor children's medical or mental health records. Mr. and Ms. May have not cooperated with requests that the minor children have forensic interviews to determine if services are needed.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 12, Court Information Sheet, *11-14; Trans., *178-179 (Aug. 11, 2020).

SCDSS's and Flemister's representations to the family court that Kaci refused to release medical information or present the children for a forensic interview were false. At no time, from March 2017 through September 2017, did SCDSS or its employees request Kaci or her husband to (1) sign any medical or mental health release, (2) provide records, or (3) submit the children to forensic interviews. *See* Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation; Plt. Tr. Ex. 5-A & 5-B, Emails;

Trans., *159-161, 178-179 (Aug. 11, 2020); Trans., *51-52 (Aug. 12, 2020).

On September 19, 2017³ at 9:03 a.m. Flemister went to Sand Hill Elementary School to interrogate C.B.M., A.R.M., and J.W.M. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *37-38; Trans., *177-178 (Aug. 11, 2020). Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *37-38; Trans., *182, 184 (Aug. 11, 2020). The interrogation lasted 15-20 minutes. Trans., *183-184 (Aug. 11, 2020). The information sought during the interview included family information on abuse, alcohol and drug use, discipline and disciplinary methods, mental health of family members, family history, finances, diet, physical health of family members, etc. Trans., *135-136 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *9, 17-18.

On September 22, 2017 Flemister went to Gregg Middle School to interrogate J.T.M. with the 6th Grade Guidance Counselor. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *39-40. The information sought during the interview included family information on abuse, alcohol and drug use, discipline and disciplinary methods, mental health of family members, family history, finances, diet, physical health of family members, etc. Trans., *135-136 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *9, 17-18.

On September 25, 2017 Flemister sent a deputy to check on J.R.M., J.H.M. and L.C.M. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *41.

On October 7, 2017 Flemister spoke with the family court appointed Guardian ad Litem Mevelyn Williams “who stated she was granted access to her the family’s home and was able to meet with the children and mother.” Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *42; Trans., *164-165 (Aug. 11, 2020). Flemister also wrote:

³ There is a discrepancy with the dates of the dictation in Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *36-37 and the school sign-in record, Plt. Tr. Ex. 2, School Sign-In Record, *5. The dictation was not created contemporaneously when the interrogations occurred while the School Sign-In Record was created the same day. *Id.*

Ms. Williams stated that at the time of the visit she did not have any concerns but she has not reviewed the case file. She stated that she will come to review the case. CM explained that she has not been granted access to the home.

CM will follow up with legal. CM will continue to monitor the family.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *42.

On October 12, 2017 the family court Merits Hearing was continued. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *43. SCDSS did not ask the family court for access to the children.

On October 13, 2017 J.H.M. and J.R.M. were admitted to Three Rivers Pediatric Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility. Plt. Tr. Ex. 13, Three Rivers Patient Demographic Profile.

On October 16, 2017 Robert Butcher, attorney for Kaci May and Warren May, wrote a letter to Principal Baird and Superintendent Joseph R. Pye. Plt. Tr. Ex. 14, Letter (October 16, 2017); Trans., *70-74 (Aug. 11, 2020). The Mays demanded the School District stop allowing SCDSS to interrogate the May children at school and warned they would seek injunctive relief in court and seek attorneys' fees and costs. Plt. Tr. Ex. 14, Letter (October 16, 2017).

On November 20, 2017 Flemister interrogated C.B.M., A.R.M., and J.W.M. at Sand Hill Elementary School. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *45; Plt. Tr. Ex. 2, School Sign-In Report, *6. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *45; Trans., *170-171, 184-185, 190-191 (Aug. 11, 2020). The information sought during the interview included family information on abuse, alcohol and drug use, discipline and disciplinary methods, mental health of family members, family history, finances, diet, physical health of family members, etc. Trans., *135-136 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *9, 17-18.

On November 20, 2017 Flemister attempted to interrogate J.T.M. at Gregg Middle School. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *46. Flemister documented the following:

CM attempted to make contact with J.T.M. Upon arrival CM was told by the school that the parent stated they need to contact with family's attorney before the child can be seen by anyone. CM asked if they have a signed court order, they did not have an order. CM requested the guidance counselor see the child as a collateral.

CM received a call from the guidance counselor that stated the child was not present at school and the child's absences are in double digits. The guidance counselor stated she would attempt contact again on 11.21.17.

CM will retrieve attendance records on 11.21.17.

Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *46; Trans., *162-163 (Aug. 11, 2020). The information sought during the interview included family information on abuse, alcohol and drug use, discipline and disciplinary methods, mental health of family members, family history, finances, diet, physical health of family members, etc. Trans., *135-136 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *9, 17-18.

On November 29, 2017 Flemister met with GAL Mevelyn Williams. The GAL had no concerns with the family visit and Flemister documented that she still had not been granted access to the home. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *47; Trans., *164-165 (Aug. 11, 2020).

On December 7, 2017, Appellants filed a verified complaint in this action and a request for a temporary restraining order against the School District, SCDSS, and several individual defendants. Complaint (December 7, 2017); Motion for a Temporary Restraining Order (Injunctive Relief Requested) (December 7, 2017). SCDSS stopped interrogating the children at school. Trans., *165 (Aug. 11, 2020).

SCDSS initiated a second SCDSS investigation, made a finding against Kaci, never interrogated the children, and never served the finding. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *50-52, 54-57.

On June 14, 2018 SCDSS, the Mays, and the Guardian ad Litem filed a Stipulation for Voluntary Dismissal with the family court. Plt. Tr. Ex. 16, Stipulation for Voluntary Dismissal

(June 14, 2018). The stipulation included, “Plaintiff SCDSS’s investigation beginning on or about March 28, 2017 resulting a finding of abuse and/or neglect on or about May 12, 2017 is hereby overturned.” Plt. Tr. Ex. 16, Stipulation for Voluntary Dismissal (June 14, 2018)

At the time of trial, only J.T.M., C.B.M., and J.R.M. attended school in the School District. Trans., *49, 77 (Aug. 12, 2020) J.H.M. was temporarily placed in an 18-month pediatric psychiatric residential treatment (PRTF) facility at Piney Ridge Treatment Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas and attended school through the program. Trans., *29 (Aug. 12, 2020). J.H.M. and J.R.M. have special needs, a 504 Plan, an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP). Trans., *49 (Aug. 12, 2020). A.R.M., J.W.M., L.C.M. attend Connections Academy. Trans., *49 (Aug. 12, 2020).

No administrative or judicial findings of abuse and/or neglect have ever been upheld or substantiated against Kaci May or Warren May. Trans., *147 (Aug. 11, 2020).

For each and every interrogation SCDSS conducted at school:

- SCDSS and the School District failed to inform the Mays that SCDSS had interrogated the children at school. Trans., *172 (Aug. 11, 2020); Trans., *35, 53-54 (Aug. 12, 2020).
- No warrant, court order, or subpoena was presented by SCDSS to authorize seizure of any of the Appellant children by SCDSS.
- SCDSS never applied for a warrant or court order to interrogate, interview, search, or strip-search the May children at school or home from March 2017 through November 2017. Trans., *156-157 (Aug. 11, 2020).
- From March 2017 through November 2017, there were never any exigent circumstances or emergency circumstances where delaying an interrogation, of the May children in order to obtain a warrant or court order would have endangered the May children.

e. South Carolina Department of Social Services Policies.

Once a complaint of abuse and/or neglect is accepted through SCDSS intake, a child protective services worker has from two to twenty-four hours to make face-to-face contact with the subject children. Trans., *128-129 (Aug. 11, 2020). It is SCDSS’s policy, upon accepting an

intake for investigation, to make face-to-face contact with all minor children within two to twenty-four hours. Trans., *128 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *14. This contact may include interrogation, interview, searches, and strip-searches. Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *14

The goal of SCDSS's Child Protective Services is to ascertain all facts related to the allegations, through the interviewing process with children, parents, and other caregivers, and to ensure the safety of the child or children involved. Trans., *125 (Aug. 11, 2020).

SCDSS's policy is taught in all of the training for case workers. Trans., *125 (Aug. 11, 2020). SCDSS's caseworkers' training is based upon law and SCDSS policy. Trans., *126 (Aug. 11, 2020). The training focuses on maltreatment, investigations, intake, family preservation intake, foster care, and adoptions. Trans., *126 (Aug. 11, 2020). SCDSS caseworkers are taught interviewing skills on how to extract information from children. Trans., *126-127 (Aug. 11, 2020).

If a parent will not allow SCDSS to interview a child, SCDSS caseworkers are taught that they can obtain a warrant through the County DSS attorney or law enforcement. Trans., *129-131, 156-157 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *35, 84; S.C. Code Ann. §63-7-920(B). If a parent will not sign releases for information, SCDSS can obtain a warrant or, once a case is filed in the Family Court, issue a subpoena. Trans., *137 (Aug. 11, 2020).

When a treatment plan is court ordered, the family court's order usually provides for SCDSS to have access to children and their records. Trans., *149 (Aug. 11, 2020)

II. Trial.

a. The Trial Court and parties relied upon the pretrial briefs throughout the trial.

The trial court and the parties relied upon and referred to the pretrial briefs of the parties

in waiving opening argument and arguing the law. Trans., *7-8 (Aug. 11, 2020); Trans., *93, 94, 98, 108-109 (Aug. 12, 2020).

b. Testimony of A.R.M.

A.R.M. was ten years old at the time she testified. Trans., *11 (Aug. 11, 2020). She was seven and eight years old and in first and second grade when the interrogations occurred. Trans., *17-18, 21 (Aug. 11, 2020). A.R.M. was home schooled because SCDSS kept pulling her out of class. Trans., *12 (Aug. 11, 2020). A.R.M. wants to return to public school. Trans., *13, 15-16 (Aug. 11, 2020).

When A.R.M. was pulled out of class, she was not told who she was meeting with. Trans., *14 (Aug. 11, 2020). A.R.M. was not told she could call her mother and talk to her before being interrogated. Trans., *14 (Aug. 11, 2020).

A.R.M. testified C.B.M. told SCDSS he did not want to speak with them, “And then we left. But they were waiting for my brother, J.W.M.” Trans., *22 (Aug. 11, 2020). A School District employee did not always sit in on the interrogations. Trans., *28 (Aug. 11, 2020).

c. Testimony of C.B.M.

C.B.M. was twelve years old when he testified. Trans., *30 (Aug. 11, 2020). He was in third and fourth grade when the interrogations occurred. Trans., *36, 38, 44 (Aug. 11, 2020). The last interrogation lasted about 20 minutes. Trans., *38 (Aug. 11, 2020). The interrogations made him, “...feel that something was wrong, because they kept coming back after I said everything was fine the first time.” Trans., *45 (Aug. 11, 2020).

C.B.M. was not told that he was being interrogated by SCDSS and he was told “...someone had to talk to me”. Trans., *31-32 (Aug. 11, 2020).

d. Testimony of Principal Marion Baird.

Marion Baird was the principal at Sand Hill Elementary School at the time of the interrogations. Trans., *47 (Aug. 11, 2020). As the principal, Baird was responsible for enforcing the School District's policies and procedures and guidance from the superintendent and the school board. Trans., *48 (Aug. 11, 2020).

Baird testified SCDSS does not need permission from the school to interview students. Trans., *51 (Aug. 11, 2020). Baird clarified SCDSS is authorized to interview children at appropriate times. Trans., *51 (Aug. 11, 2020). Baird did not know if SCDSS could come to the school and interrogate the same child every day or interview all of the children in a class. Trans., *51-52 (Aug. 11, 2020). "We have been advised to allow DSS to interview children, if they see a need." Trans., *53 (Aug. 11, 2020).

Baird equated SCDSS interrogations of children as "a conversation, how are you doing". Trans., *64 (Aug. 11, 2020).

When SCDSS comes to a school to interrogate a child, the School District asks the employee to present their badge and the school makes a copy of it and they write the names of the children SCDSS wants to see on the copy and the dates and time they are interrogated by SCDSS. Trans., *101, 179-180; 182-183 (Aug. 11, 2020). The copy will also have a notation of the name of any School District employees who sat in on the interview. Trans., *103 (Aug. 11, 2020). A record of the SCDSS interrogations are kept in a folder by the reception desk at the school. Trans., *102 (Aug. 11, 2020).

e. Testimony of Jasmine Flemister.

Jasmine Flemister was a Family Preservation Case Manager during the time of the events in this matter. Trans., *143 (Aug. 11, 2020). Flemister attended SCDSS's Basic Child Welfare

Services Course for six weeks. Trans., *144 (Aug. 11, 2020).

Family preservation is the unit within Child Welfare Services or Child Protective Services that works with the family to maintain the family unit by providing resources and referrals to what resources for appropriate treatment. Trans., *172 (Aug. 11, 2020). SCDSS works with the family to develop treatment plans and locate or investigate appropriate services for the entire family. Trans., *173 (Aug. 11, 2020). Family Preservation includes making monthly contact with the involved children. Trans., *173 (Aug. 11, 2020).

f. Testimony of Kaci May.

Kaci was previously employed as a schoolteacher. Trans., *9 (Aug. 12, 2020). She taught at the Florence Crittenton Residential Program for Pregnant Teens in Charleston, South Carolina for twelve years. Trans., *9, 60 (Aug. 12, 2020). This included attending treatment team meetings with, “therapists, doctors, to manage children with maladaptive behaviors, and then I became a foster parent and went through the training and took in any information I could.” Trans., *9 (Aug. 12, 2020).

Kaci testified:

These are my children. I – Warren and I took -- take parenting very seriously. We thought that we were great parents and our children are great children. We have a wonderful time out and about playing and managing and whatever. I have a right to protect my children. I have a right to build a safe, you know, hub for my children, to choose the people who are around my children. To protect them. And that right was taken away from me.

Trans., *31 (Aug. 12, 2020). Kaci also testified to the following:

I believe that the school is a place for my children to receive an education based on the standards put through the Department of Education. The school should not be a place where my children are investigated or I’m being investigated. If you don’t believe that my children are in imminent danger. So anytime if a child if you think a child is going to be, you know, hurt by going home or something, by all means, investigate at school.

But that was not the case and, therefore, my children should not be continued to be interviewed while at school. My children did not feel comfortable with that. They wanted to be just another child. They wanted to trust the people in the school building. I wanted to trust the people in the school building and there was no trust.

Trans., *52-53 (Aug. 12, 2020).

Arguments

I. Standard of Review.

At the close of Appellants' case, the trial court granted the Defendants' Motion for Directed Verdict. The procedural vehicle the trial court should have used is Rule 41(b), SCRPC. But the standards of review are the same for both directed verdict and involuntary nonsuit and it should not be an issue.

In deciding whether to grant or deny a motion for involuntary nonsuit, the trial court must view the evidence and all reasonable inferences in the light most favorable to the Plaintiffs. *Bullard v. Ehrhardt*, 283 S.C. 557, 324 S.E.2d 61 (1984). If there is no relevant, competent evidence reasonably tending to establish the material elements of the Appellants' case, a motion for an involuntary nonsuit must be granted. In reviewing the trial court's ruling on a motion for an involuntary nonsuit, the appellate court applies the same standard as the trial court. *Rewis v. Grand Strand Gen. Hosp.*, 290 S.C. 40, 348 S.E.2d 173 (1986).

Though there is not much case law concerning the appellate standard of review on appeal from the grant of a motion for involuntary nonsuit, it appears that the appellate court applies the same standard as does the trial court, much the same as with review of decisions on motions for a directed verdict, J.N.O.V., or summary judgment. *See Johnson v. J.P. Stevens & Co., Inc.*, 308 S.C. 116, 118, 417 S.E.2d 527 (1992) (seeming to apply this analysis, without discussion of standard); *Ex parte USAA: Smith v. Moore*, 365 S.C. 50, 614 S.E.2d 652, 653 (Ct. App. 2005)

(“[b]ecause a dismissal [under Rule 41(b)] has the same effect as summary judgment, the standard for summary judgment applies”). For Rule 50, directed verdict, see *Johnson v. Phillips*, 315 S.C. 407, 433 S.E.2d 895 (Ct. App. 1993); *Snow v. City of Columbia*, 305 S.C. 544, 409 S.E.2d 797 (Ct. App. 1991); *Baggerly v. CSX Trasp. Inc.*, 370 S.C. 362, 635 S.E.2d 97 (2006) (“[T]he evidence and all reasonable inferences therefrom must be viewed in the light most favorable to the party against whom the verdict was directed.”).

Appellant children are minors, it is the duty of the courts to protect the interest of parties under legal disability because “[s]uch persons are wards of the court of chancery.” *Caughman v. Caughman*, 247 S.C. 104, 146 S.E.2d 93 (1965). Therefore, an appellate court “will take notice of any error prejudicial to them, which is apparent on the record, even though not raised by appropriate plea or exception,” because “the duty to protecting the rights of incompetents has precedence over procedural rules otherwise limiting the scope of review.” *Id. See also, Joiner ex rel Rivas v. Rivas*, 342 S.C. 102 (1970) ([W]here the rights and best interests of a minor child are concerned, the court may appropriately raise, *ex mero motu*, issues not raised by the parties.”)

II. SCDSS, public schools, and child protective services investigations.

a. SCDSS was created by the South Carolina General Assembly to investigate, identify, and remedy child abuse and neglect in our communities.

The South Carolina General Assembly has attempted to address child abuse and neglect by establishing a children’s policy through the Children’s Code, Title 63. S.C. Code Ann. § 63-1-20(a). SCDSS is a statutory creature, and its organic statute is found at S.C. Code Ann. § 43-1-10. SCDSS’s first substantive statute is found at S.C. Code Ann. § 43-1-80. SCDSS is charged with supervising and administering the, “public welfare activities and functions of the State...and child protective services as referred to in Title 63, Chapter 7...”. *Id.*

All child welfare intervention by the State has as its primary goal the welfare and safety

of the child. S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-10(A)(5). South Carolina’s Child Protection and Permanency statutes require SCDSS to “establish fair and equitable procedures, compatible with due process of law to intervene in family life with due regard to the safety and welfare of all family members.” S.C. Code Ann. 63-7-10(B)(4).

SCDSS’s responsibilities shall include, but are not limited to, assigning and monitoring initial child protection responsibility through periodic review of services offered throughout the State; [and] assisting in the diagnosis of child abuse and neglect. S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-910(C)(1 – 2).

b. Schools are essential partners in the identification and investigation of child abuse and neglect.

School attendance is often the only time an abused or neglected child is seen outside of the home. Schools are often the first line of defense in the identification of child abuse and neglect in our communities. Similarly, schools are often the only places SCDSS and/or law enforcement may have contact with a child without the undue influence of an abusive or neglectful caregiver.

The South Carolina General Assembly recognized this when it charged the State to “...encourage community involvement in the provision of children’s services...” S.C. Code Ann. § 63-1-20(C). “The children’s policy provided for in this chapter shall be implemented through the cooperative efforts of state, county and municipal legislative, judicial and executive branches,...” S.C. Code Ann. § 63-1-20(E). It also required SCDSS “to actively...seek the cooperation and involvement of local public and private institutions, groups, and programs concerned with matters of child protection and welfare within the area it serves.” S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-900(C).

c. Child abuse and neglect investigations are limited by statute.

The execution of child abuse and neglect investigations are codified in S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-920. This statute is discussed in detail below and provides timelines, procedures for obtaining a warrant to (1) interview a child, (2) inspect the condition of a child, (3) inspect a premises, and (4) to obtain medical, school, and other records. SCDSS may promulgate regulations and formulate policies and methods of administration to effectively carry out child protective services, activities, and responsibilities. S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-910(E).

The Children's Code states that SCDSS has sixty days to conclude an investigation for child abuse and/or neglect. S.C. Code Ann. §§ 63-7-920(A)(2) and 63-7-930(A).

III. The trial court erred in failing to issue injunctive relief to Plaintiffs.

An injunction is an equitable remedy not a matter of legal right and is committed to the discretion of the court and granted when a review of all of the evidence establishes that it is necessary to prevent irreparable harm. *Johnson v. Phillips*, 315 S.C. 407, 433 S.E.2d 895 (Ct. App. 1993), *rev'd on other grounds*, *Smith v. Phillips*, 318 S.C. 453, 458 S.E.2d 427 (1995); *Miller v. Borg-Warner Acceptance Corp.*, 279 S.C. 90, 302 S.E.2d 340 (1983). The injunction is a drastic remedy and should be carefully considered and granted only when legal rights are invaded or legal duties wantonly neglected. *Carter v. Lake City Baseball Club, Inc.*, 218 S.C. 255, 62 S.E.2d 470 (1950); *LeFurgy v. Long Cove Club Owners Ass'n*, 313 S.C. 555, 443 S.E.2d 577 (Ct. App. 1994).

a. The trial court erred in finding the Appellants did not establish a likelihood of success on the merits.

We do not suspend the constitution in order to protect children. Plaintiffs' claims are grounded in the Constitution. 42 U.S.C. §1983 states:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or

usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress...

42 U.S.C. §1983. Plaintiffs assert the Defendants violated Amend. I, IV, V, VI, and XIV of the U.S. Const.

Similarly, Article I of the South Carolina Constitution contains three relevant sections:

§ 3. Privileges and immunities; due process; equal protection of laws. The privileges and immunities of citizens of this State and of the United States under this Constitution shall not be abridged, nor shall any person be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor shall any person be denied the equal protection of the laws.

§ 10. Searches and seizures; invasions of privacy. The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures and unreasonable invasions of privacy shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, the person or thing to be seized, and the information to be obtained.

§ 12. Double jeopardy; self-incrimination. No person shall be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or liberty, nor shall any person be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself.

S.C. Const. art. I. The Court should note that S.C. Const. art. I, §10 is much more stringent than the Fourth Amendment, as it includes an additional clause, "...unreasonable invasions of privacy shall not be violated,..."

b. School interrogations are seizures under the 4th Amendment.

The Fourth Amendment protects a child's right to be free from unreasonable seizure by a social worker. *In the Interest of Thomas B.D.*, 326 S.C. 614, 617, 486 S.E.2d 498 (Ct. App. 1997); *Dees v. Cty. of San Diego*, 960 F.3d 1145, 1154 (9th Cir. 2020) (Citing *Kirkpatrick v. Cty. of Washoe*, 843 F.3d 784, 790-91 (9th Cir. 2016) (*en banc*)). "A 'seizure' triggering the Fourth Amendment's protections occurs only when government actors have, 'by means of physical

force or show of authority,...in some way restrained the liberty of a citizen.” *Camden v. Hilton*, 360 S.C. 164, 175, 600 S.E.2d 88 (Ct. App. 2004); *Dees*, 960 F.3d at 1154, (Citing *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386, 395 n.10 (1989) (quoting *Terry v. Ohio*, 392 U.S. 1, 19 n.16 (1968)). See *Schulkers v. Kammer*, 955 F.3d 520, 536 (6th Cir. 2020) (*O’Malley v. City of Flint*, 652 F.3d 662, 668 (6th Cir. 2011) (quoting *United States v. Mendenhall*, 446 U.S. 544, 554 (1980)). Courts generally should take into account the child’s age when determining if a reasonable person would have felt free to leave. *Schulkers*, at 536 (Citing *Jones v. Hunt*, 410 F.3d 1221, 1226 (10th Cir. 2005); *Doe v. Heck*, 327 F.3d 492, 510 (7th Cir. 2003)).

“When the actions of the [official] do not show an unambiguous intent to restrain or when an individual’s submission to a show of governmental authority takes the form of passive acquiescence...a seizure occurs if, ‘in view of all of the circumstances surrounding the incident, a reasonable person would have believed that he was not free to leave.’” *Dees* 960 F.3d at 1154, (Citing *Brendlin v. California*, 551 U.S. 249, 255 (2007) (quoting *Mendenhall* at 544, 554, (1980)). See also, *State v. Spears*, 429 S.C. 422, 434, 839 S.E.2d 450 (2020). Common sense dictates that a reasonable child would not have felt free to decline or otherwise resist going to the front office with a school official. *Williams v. Cty. of San Diego*, 2021 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 25711, *17 (S.D. Cal. February 10, 2021) (Citing *Neel v. Cty. of San Diego*, No. 18-CV-1764 W (MSB), 2019 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 70261, at *10-11 (S.D. Cal. Apr. 25, 2019)). See also, Trans., *14-15, 19 (Aug. 11, 2020) (A.R.M. was given no choice about the interrogation and when she was interrogated, she didn’t, “like to disobey adults and...I’m not comfortable when I disobey adults.”); Trans., *31-35 (Aug. 11, 2020) (C.B.M. was not given a choice and he did not feel free to leave); Trans., *65-66 (Aug. 11, 2020) (Baird testified children who refused to speak with SCDSS could be given a referral for disobeying a teacher).

The majority of Courts across the country have found school children retain a fundamental right to be free from search and seizure by social services workers. “A reasonable nine-year-old child who is called out of class by school officials for the purpose of meeting with a social worker who has already disturbed the child's family life, and who is not advised that she may refuse to speak with the social worker, will feel compelled to talk to the social worker and remain there until dismissed.” *Dees v. Cty. of San Diego*, 302 F. Supp. 3d 1168, 1179 (D.S. Cal. October 10, 2017). *See also Doe v. Heck*, 327 F.3d 492, 510 (7th Cir. 2003) (20-minute interview of eleven-year-old boy was a seizure where the child was escorted from class by the principal, caseworkers, and a uniformed police officer into church’s empty nursery and questioned by the caseworkers, with the police officer present, about corporal punishment); *Stoot v. City of Everett*, 582 F.3d 910, 918 (9th Cir. 2009) (two-hour school interview of 14-year-old boy during which police detective threatened punishment if the child denied guilt and promised leniency if he admitted guilt constituted a seizure); *Jones v. Hunt*, 410 F.3d 1221, 1226 (10th Cir. 2005) (an “emotionally vulnerable” 16-year-old female was seized where a social worker and uniformed police officer, both of whom the teenager knew “had the authority to determine her custodial care,” confined her for an “hour or two” in a small office at her school and repeatedly threatened that they would arrest her if she did not agree to live with her father); *Schulkers v. Kammer*, 955 F.3d 520, 536 (6th Cir. 2020) (Social worker violated Plaintiffs’ Fourth Amendment rights by seizing them from their classrooms and subjecting them to interrogation without any suspicion of child abuse, and without obtaining a warrant or consent. We hold that the Fourth Amendment governs a social worker’s in-school interview of a child pursuant to a child abuse investigation).

There are several exceptions to the probable cause requirement, including consent, exigent circumstances, and in some instances, “when ‘special needs, beyond the normal need for

law enforcement, make the warrant and probable-cause requirement impracticable.” *Schulkers*, at 536 (Citing *Griffin v. Wisconsin*, 483 U.S. 868, 873, (1987)). None of these exceptions were present at any time during and subsequent to the SCDSS investigation. *See* Trans., *156-157 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation; Plt. Tr. Ex. 3, Intake; and Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing. The substantial record demonstrates that at any time, SCDSS could have sought relief with the family court had probable cause been present. *See* Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *7 (meet with legal), 9 (complete inspection warrant), 11 (prepare for court intervention), 16 (contacting Kaci’s attorney), 17 (contact legal), 18 (email to Kaci’s attorney), 19 (contact legal), 20-23 (email re Kaci’s attorney), 26 (send letter to Kaci’s attorney and request children’s records), 27 (email between SCDSS attorney and Kaci’s attorney), 28 (email to Kaci’s attorney) 32 (email to Kaci’s attorney), 33 (email to Kaci about contacting her attorney), 34 (email from Kaci’s attorney), 35 (email from Kaci about contacting her attorney), 43 (court intervention), 44 (follow up with legal); Plt. Tr. Ex. 4, Guided Supervision Staffing, *2 (meet with legal), 4 (complete inspection warrant), 6 (prepare for court intervention); Plt. Tr. Ex.s 5-A & 5-B; Plt. Tr. Ex. 8, SCDSS Case Transfer and/or Case Staffing ([Case Manager] was unable to gain access to the home. CM is preparing paperwork); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *17, 35, 48-50, 84. In fact, the record demonstrates that SCDSS had access to, policies related to, and the ability to seek a warrant or court order--and it considered seeking a warrant or court order.

Because SCDSS and Flemister were limited by the Mays, they contacted collateral sources and third parties, to learn information about the Appellant children. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *29-30, 36, 42, 46, 47. SCDSS and Flemister also asked law enforcement to assist in entering the home. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *24, 26, 31, 41. Lastly, when SCDSS filed for family court intervention, it never asked for access to the children because it never had probable cause

to do so. Plt. Tr. Ex. 12, Family Court Pleadings.

c. Parents have Fourteenth Amendment interest in the “companionship, care, custody and management of their children”.

Parents have a cognizable liberty interest in the “companionship, care, custody and management of [their] children.” *S.C. Dep’t of Soc. Servs. v. Truitt*, 361 S.C. 272, 281, 603 S.E.2d 867 (Ct. App. 2004); *Lassiter v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs. of Durham Cty., N.C.*, 452 U.S. 18, 27 (1981); see *Wallis v. Spencer*, 202 F.3d 1126, 1137 (9th Cir. 2000). District Courts considering analogous circumstances found that a state official’s seizure and subsequent interview of a minor on school grounds without judicial authorization, parental consent, or exigent circumstances amounted to unconstitutional interference with the parent-child relationship. See, *Williams v. County of San Diego*, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 210404, 2017 WL 6541251, at *7-8 (S.D.Cal. Dec. 21, 2017); *Rabinovitz v. City of Los Angeles*, 287 F.Supp.3d 933, 951 (C.D. Cal.2018). See also *Doe v. Heck*, 327 F.3d at 524 (“[B]ecause the defendants had no evidence giving rise to a reasonable suspicion that the plaintiff parents were abusing their children, or that they were complicit in any such abuse, the defendants violated the plaintiffs’ right to familial relations by conducting a custodial interview of [the child] without notifying or obtaining the consent of his parents and by targeting the plaintiff parents as child abusers.”).

Appellants assert that S.C. Const. art. I, §10 is also applicable here, as, “unreasonable invasions of privacy shall not be violated”. In this case, it is without dispute that actual deliberation of the Appellants’ due process rights was not only practical, but it was considered, disregarded, and violated over and over and over again.

Courts have made it clear that neither peace officers nor social workers may dispense with constitutional constraints in their investigation of child abuse allegations when there is no imminent threat of serious harm to the child. *Wallis v. Spencer*, 202 F.3d 1126, 1130-1131 (9th

Cir. 2000); *Rogers v. County of San Joaquin*, 487 F.3d 1288 (9th Cir. 2007); *Calabretta v. Floyd*, 189 F.3d 808, 817 (9th Cir. 1999); *Doe v. Heck*, 327 F.3d 492 (7th Cir. 2003); *Tenenbaum v. Williams*, 193 F.3d 581, 604 (2nd Cir. 1999); *Jones v. Hunt*, 410 F.3d 1221 (10th Cir. 2005); *Rabinovitz v. City of Los Angeles*, 287 F.Supp.3d 933 (C.D. Cal. 2018).

While the protection of children from abuse and neglect is vital, “the rights of families to be free from governmental interference and arbitrary state action are also important.” *Rogers v. County of San Joaquin*, 487 F.3d 1288, 1297. It therefore follows that a balance must be struck, “on the one hand, the need to protect children from abuse and neglect and, on the other, the preservation of the essential privacy and liberty interests that families are guaranteed under both the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments of our Constitution.” *Id.*

“Because the swing of every pendulum brings with it potential adverse consequences, it is important to emphasize that in the area of child abuse, as with the investigation and prosecution of all crimes, the state is constrained by the substantive and procedural guarantees of the Constitution. The fact that the suspected crime may be heinous—whether it involves children or adults—does not provide cause for the state to ignore the rights of the accused or any other parties. Otherwise, serious injustices may result. In cases of alleged child abuse, governmental failure to abide by constitutional constraints may have deleterious long-term consequences for the child and, indeed, for the entire family. Ill-considered and improper governmental action may create significant injury where no problem of any kind previously existed.”

Wallis v. Spencer, 202 F.3d at 1130-1131.

When responding to a report of abuse and neglect, SCDSS teaches its caseworkers to go to the child’s school to interrogate the child and it is SCDSS’s policy to interrogate children at school when school is in session at any time. Trans., *131-132, 148 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy 719. *See also*, Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *1-5, 12-13, 37-40, 45-46. SCDSS testified that it does not need to obtain parental permission to interrogate a child to gather evidence against the parents. Trans., *135-136 (Aug. 11, 2020). This information sought includes

abuse, alcohol and drug use, discipline and disciplinary methods, mental health of family members, family history, finances, diet, physical health of family members, etc. Trans., *135-136 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy, *17-18. After a Child Protective Services investigation has been completed, SCDSS testified that it can continue to interrogate children at school. Trans., *140 (Aug. 11, 2020). The head of SCDSS Training was unaware of any legal authority that permitted SCDSS to interrogate children without permission of a parent after an investigation was completed. Trans., *139 (Aug. 11, 2020).

There is no doubt SCDSS used the May children's school attendance to seize and interrogate the children against the wishes of the Mays and their children. SCDSS, the School District, and the trial court all believe that neither Kaci nor her children have constitutional protections in these settings.

d. The trial court erred in finding that S.C. Code Ann. §63-7-920 was not limited by the Plaintiffs' constitutional protections under Amend. I, IV, V, VI, and XIV of the U.S. Const. and S.C. Const. art. I, §§3 10, and 12.

SCDSS acknowledged that without a Family Court order, there is no requirement for a parent to let SCDSS in the home, to return phone calls, or to let SCDSS talk to children. Trans., *188 (Aug. 11, 2020). SCDSS also acknowledged that even though SCDSS policy requires a face-to-face visit and interrogation of a child, a parent does not have to let SCDSS see their child. Trans., *191 (Aug. 11, 2020)

The trial court's reliance upon S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-920(c) and assertion the statute requires schools to allow SCDSS to interrogate children wherever and whenever it wishes is misguided. No state statute can diminish Federal and State Constitutional protections in the manner the trial court set forth.⁴ Blind application of S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-920(C) fails to

⁴ Plaintiffs do concede exigent circumstances allow searches and seizures under the Fourth Amendment and S.C. Const. art. I, §10, but no such circumstances were ever present in this

acknowledge due process protections enumerated in paragraph (B). Paragraphs (B) and (C) of the statute state:

(B) The department may file with the family court an affidavit and a petition to support issuance of a warrant at any time after receipt of a report. The family court must issue the warrant if the affidavit and petition establish probable cause to believe the child is an abused or neglected child and that the investigation cannot be completed without issuance of the warrant. The warrant may authorize the department to interview the child, to inspect the condition of the child, to inspect the premises where the child may be located or may reside, and to obtain copies of medical, school, or other records concerning the child.

(C) The department or law enforcement, or both, may interview the child alleged to have been abused or neglected and any other child in the household during the investigation. The interviews may be conducted on school premises, at childcare facilities, at the child's home or at other suitable locations and in the discretion of the department or law enforcement, or both, may be conducted outside the presence of the parents. To the extent reasonably possible, the needs and interests of the child must be accommodated in making arrangements for interviews, including time, place, method of obtaining the child's presence, and conduct of the interview. The department or law enforcement, or both, shall provide notification of the interview to the parents as soon as reasonably possible during the investigation if notice will not jeopardize the safety of the child or the course of the investigation. All state, law enforcement, and community agencies providing child welfare intervention into a child's life should coordinate their services to minimize the number of interviews of the child to reduce potential emotional trauma to the child.

S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-920(B -C).

Paragraph (B) of S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-920 provides tools to facilitate SCDSS in conducting its investigation, but with judicial oversight and due process protections. The requirement of an affidavit in support of a petition for a warrant is no different than the same requirements for law enforcement and other state officers. See S.C. Code Ann. § 17-13-140 (law enforcement; *See State v. Dill*, 423 S.C. 534, 542, 816 S.E.2d 557 (2018)); § 41-15-260 (Commission of Labor); § 44-53-1400 (Lead Poisoning Prevention and Control); § 61-6-4540 (Alcoholic Beverage Control); § 44-53-500 (DHEC Narcotic and Controlled Substances).

matter.

Paragraph (C) cannot be read in isolation and absent the due process provisions found in the preceding paragraph, and the United States and South Carolina Constitutions. The trial court's application of S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-920 completely abrogates the protections of Amends, I, IV, V, VI, and XIV of the U.S. Const. and S.C. Const. Article I, §§ 3, 10, and 12

There is no doubt the State and our communities have a legitimate, vested interest in the protection of children from abuse and neglect. "South Carolina, as *parens patriae*, protects and safeguards the welfare of its children." *In the Interest of Stephen W.*, 409 S.C. 73, 78, 761 S.E.2d 231 (2014) (*Harris v. Harris*, 307 S.C. 351, 353, 415 S.E.2d 391, 393 (1992)). *See also State v. Cagle*, 111 S.C. 548, 552, 96 S.E. 291, 292 (1918) ("The state is vitally interested in its youth, for in them is the hope of the future. It may therefore exercise large powers in providing for their protection and welfare."). "The State has a profound interest in the welfare of the child, particularly his or her being sheltered from abuse. The right to familial relations is not absolute." *Berman v. Young*, 291 F.3d 976, 983 (7th Cir. 2002); *Brokaw v. Mercer County*, 235 F.3d 1000, 1018 (2000). The liberty interest in familial privacy and integrity is limited by the compelling governmental interest in the protection of children particularly where the children need to be protected from their own parents and does not include the right to be free from child abuse investigations. *Brown v. Newberger*, 291 F.3d 89, 94 (1st Cir. 2002); *Watterson v. Page*, 987 F.2d 1, 8 (1st Cir. 1993).

The South Carolina General Assembly recognized the countervailing interests of protecting the health, welfare, and best interests of South Carolina's children against the due process and fundamental liberties of the First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution when it wrote the Children's Code, requiring SCDSS to "establish fair and equitable procedures, compatible with due process of law to intervene in family life with due

regard to the safety and welfare of all family members.” S.C. Code Ann. 63-7-10(B)(4).

As stated above, there are legitimate circumstances when interrogation of a child at school without a court order or a warrant would be appropriate. Such exigent circumstances would occur on a case-by-case basis and would include probable cause that suspected abuse and/or neglect that threatened the life and safety of a child was imminent and certain or that certain evidence would be destroyed or wasted. Otherwise, there is no compelling reason for SCDSS caseworkers to be exempt from the warrant requirement of the United States Constitution and Article I, § 10 of the South Carolina Constitution. *Doe v. Heck*, 327 F.3d 492, 509 (7th Cir. 2003) (Citing *Marshall v. Barlow's, Inc.*, 436 U.S. 307, 312 (1978) (the Fourth Amendment's prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures protects against warrantless intrusions during civil as well as criminal investigations by the government. Thus, the strictures of the Fourth Amendment apply to child welfare workers, as well as all other governmental employees.)

The law thus seeks to strike a balance among the rights and interests of parents, children, and the State. *Tenenbaum v. Willaims*, 193 F.3d 581, 595 (2nd Cir. 1999) (Citing *Franz v. Lytle*, 997 F.2d 784, 792-93 (10th Cir. 1993). “While the paramount importance of the child’s well-being can be effectuated only by rendering State officials secure in the knowledge that they can act quickly and decisively in urgent situations and that the law will protect them when they do, there is a critical difference between necessary latitude and infinite license.” Doriane Lambelet Coleman, *Storming the Castle to Save the Children: The Ironic Costs of a Child Welfare Exception to the Fourth Amendment*, 47 Wm. & Mary L. Rev. 413, 417 (2005).

The Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld the appropriateness of federal injunctive relief to combat a “pattern” of illicit law enforcement behavior. See *Allee v. Medrano*, 416 U.S. 802,

812, (1974); *Hague v. CIO*, 307 U.S. 496 (1939); see also *INS v. Delgado*, 466 U.S. 210 n.4 (1984); *Rizzo v. Goode*, 423 U.S. 362, 375 (1976) (distinguishing *Allee* and *Hague* as involving patterns of misbehavior, not isolated incidents). While a likelihood is required, the alleged harm does not need to be occurring or be certain to occur. *Michigan v. United States Army Corps of Eng'rs*, 667 F.3d 765, 788 (7th Cir. 2011).

Appellants have shown that SCDSS has a written policy and it trains its caseworkers to interrogate children at school without regard to children's or families' Fourth Amendment protections. Trans., *125-131, 148 (Aug. 11, 2020); Plt. Tr. Ex. 18, SCDSS Policy 719. See also, Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *1-5, 12-13, 37-40, 45-46. Where the harm alleged is directly traceable to a written policy, see *Gomez v. Vernon*, 255 F.3d 1118, 1127 (9th Cir. 2001), there is an implicit likelihood of its repetition in the immediate future. Second, the Appellant may demonstrate that the harm is part of a "pattern of officially sanctioned...behavior, violative of the plaintiffs' [federal] rights." *LaDuke v. Nelson*, 762 F.2d 1318, 1323 (9th Cir. 1985).

Here, the School District was not aware that S.C. Code Ann. §63-7-920 limited school interrogations to the time period when an investigation was open. Trans., *54-55 (Aug. 11, 2020). The School District was aware that SCDSS interviewed the Appellant children well into November 2017. Trans., *55 (Aug. 11, 2020). When asked about notifying parents of interrogations, Marion Baird testified, "...typically we do not call parents regarding DSS business." Trans., *69 (Aug. 11, 2020). Again, there were no facts present to necessitate an exception to the warrant requirement, after the investigation was complete, the Defendants continued to interrogate the children, and the interrogations continued for an additional six months.

e. The trial court erred in finding the Appellants failed to show irreparable harm.

“[T]he denial of a constitutional right...constitutes irreparable harm for purposes of equitable jurisdiction.” *Ross v. Meese*, 818 F.2d 1132, 1135 (4th Cir. 1987). Where the Court has found a likelihood of success on Plaintiffs’ due process claim, the deprivation of such a constitutional right alone would constitute irreparable harm. See *Elrod v. Burns*, 427 U.S. 347, 373 (1976) (plurality opinion) (finding that infringement on a First Amendment right, even for “minimal periods of time, unquestionably constitutes irreparable injury”); *Planned Parenthood Ariz., Inc. v. Humble*, 753 F.3d 905, 911 (9th Cir. 2014) (“[T]he deprivation of constitutional rights unquestionably constitutes irreparable injury.”). See also, *Am. Coll. of Obstetricians & Gynecologists v. United States FDA*, 472 F.Supp.3d 183 (D. Md. July 13, 2020).

Irreparable injury means that the injunction is reasonably necessary to protect the rights of the plaintiff pending the litigation. *Johnson v. Phillips*, 315 S.C. 407, 433 S.E.2d 895 (Ct. App. 1993), *rev'd on other grounds*, *Smith v. Phillips*, 318 S.C. 453, 458 S.E.2d 427 (1995); While a finding of damages is not a prerequisite to the issuance of an injunction, the decision to issue injunctive relief must be based upon a balancing of the equities. *Smith v. Phillips*, 318 S.C. 453, 458 S.E.2d 427 (1995). Assessing harm to the opposing party and weighing the public interest “merge” when the government is the opposing party. *Nken v. Holder*, 556 U.S. 418, 435 (2009).

Irreparable injury does not mean that the injury is beyond the possibility of compensation in damages. *Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church v. Greenville*, 211 S.C. 442, 45 S.E.2d 841 (1947). Irreparable injury has been found in many circumstances. For example, temporary relief was granted to prevent misappropriation of property⁵ or to prevent trespass on property⁶ or

⁵ *Columbia Broadcasting Sys., Inc. v. Custom Recording Co.*, 258 S.C. 465, 189 S.E.2d 305,

prevent violations of ordinances,⁷ or the loss of a business.⁸ The Supreme Court gave some insight into the considerations when it stated that “where the mischief is such, from its continuous and permanent character, that it must occasion constantly recurring grievances, which cannot be otherwise prevented, a court of equity ought to interfere by injunction to stay the wrong and protect the complainants' property and personal rights from hurt or destruction.” *Carter v. Lake City Baseball Club, Inc.*, 218 S.C. 255, 271-72, 62 S.E.2d 470, 477 (1950) (citation omitted).

Recently, the United States Supreme Court held, that “[t]o satisfy the “irreducible constitutional minimum” of Article III standing, a plaintiff must not only establish (1) an injury in fact (2) that is fairly traceable to the challenged conduct, but he must also seek (3) a remedy that is likely to redress that injury. *Uzuegbunam v. Preczewski*, 209 L.Ed. 2d 94, 101, 141 S.Ct. 792 (2021) (Citing *Spokeo, Inc. v. Robins*, 578 U.S. 330, 338 (2016); see also *Gill v. Whitford*, 138 S. Ct. 1916, 1929 (2018)). “[W]e conclude that a request for nominal damages satisfies the redressability element of standing where a plaintiff’s claim is based on a completed violation of a legal right.” *Uzuegbunam v. Preczewski*, 209 L.Ed. 2d 94, 105, 141 S.Ct. 792 (2021). In other words, the United States Supreme Court held that even if all harms other than nominal harm from a completed constitutional violation exists, then the case will not become moot for failure to satisfy the redressability prong of standing.

“[A] constitutional injury—including alleged Fourth Amendment violations—may satisfy the irreparable harm component of this factor. *Williams v. Cty. of San Diego*, 2020 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 233539, 2020 WL 7318125 (S.D. Cal. December 11, 2020) (Citing, e.g., *Easyriders*

cert. denied, 409 U.S. 1007 (1972).

⁶ *South Carolina Elec. & Gas Co. v. Hix*, 306 S.C. 173, 410 S.E.2d 582 (Ct. App. 1991).

⁷ *Beaufort County v. Butler*, 316 S.C. 465, 451 S.E.2d 386 (1994).

⁸ *Levine v. Spartanburg Reg. Servs. Dist.*, 367 S.C. 458, 626 S.E.2d 38 (Ct. App. 2006); *Peek v.*

Freedom F.I.G.H.T. v. Hannigan, 92 F.3d 1486, 1501 (9th Cir. 1996) (“Indeed, this circuit has upheld injunctions against pervasive violations of the Fourth Amendment.”).

The trial court’s finding that “Plaintiff[s] failed to produce any evidence supporting...irreparable harm” Order, *3-4 (September 18, 2020). First, there are the numerous completed violations of each of the Appellants’ constitutional and legal rights on March 29 (A.R.M.) and 30 (C.B.M., J.H.M., and J.R.M.), May 12 (J.H.M., J.R.M., A.R.M., and J.T.M.) and 25 (J.T.M. and C.B.M.), September 19 (A.R.M., C.B.M., and J.W.M.) and 22 (J.T.M.) and November 20, 2017 (A.R.M., C.B.M., and J.W.M.). See *Uzuegbunam*, at 101.

It appears the trial court weighted harm on a scale of hysteria:

CBM and ARM, testified that they were not upset about the meetings or interviews with DSS. They were not crying and did not observe any of their siblings to be upset or crying. There was no evidence that any of the children’s grades suffered or that any of the children were harmed to any extent that would override the need to meet or talk with them regarding the report of abuse or neglect, which was indisputably justified and reasonable in this case.

Order, *3-4 (September 18, 2020).

It also appears that the nature of the seizures by SCDSS was a factor in the trial court determining that there were no Constitutional violations. But this is wrong. The official need not always “display an intimidating demeanor or use coercive language” for a suspect to believe he cannot decline an officer’s requests or otherwise terminate the encounter. *United States v. Richardson*, 385 F.3d 625, 630 (6th Cir. 2004). This is particularly true where, as here, the persons being confronted are young children who are well aware of the power of the social worker to disrupt her family. Children in adoptive families and children of low-income families view both law enforcement and social services differently than the rest of society. This comes from personal experience, parenting, and socialization. There is no “Officer Friendly” and the

Spartanburg Regional Healthcare Sys., 367 S.C. 450, 626 S.E.2d 34 (Ct. App. 2005).

nice ladies from social services strike fear in many children who have seen their peers, relatives, and siblings disappear from school. The record was replete with evidence of harms. Well-founded fear and anxiety proximately caused by continuous unconstitutional governmental intrusions, which are irreparable harms.

The evidence shows A.R.M. testified that she was uncomfortable during the interrogations. Trans., *14, 19-20 (Aug. 11, 2020). A.R.M. would distance herself and become angry at J.H.M. and J.R.M. because she thought they were to blame. Trans., *46-47 (Aug. 12, 2020). C.B.M. testified that the SCDSS interrogations make him feel nervous and he was afraid that his siblings would be taken. Trans., *31 (Aug. 11, 2020) (...like my siblings wouldn't be on the bus when I came home."). C.B.M. did not feel like he could have gotten up and walked out of the interrogation. Trans., *34-35 (Aug. 11, 2020). C.B.M. remains afraid that SCDSS will come back to the school and try to interrogate him. Trans., *35 (Aug. 11, 2020). C.B.M. was afraid, "DSS was trying to...dig up dirt and try to take everybody away...[a]nd trying to prove that our family was bad..." Trans., *43 (Aug. 11, 2020).

Appellants demonstrated that when SCDSS came to the house on March 31, 2017, J.H.M. hid under her bed because she was afraid SCDSS was going to remove her. Trans., *28-29 (Aug. 12, 2020). After J.H.M. was interrogated at school, she:

"would stay up all night long and to into a state of mania where she would just – she would masturbate compulsively. She would harm herself masturbating. She would just pace her room all night long. She would talk to her self in the mirror. She would become extremely defiant and violent and destructive of house property. She would become very clingy on the other hand. Need extra reassurances that everything's fine. I'm still mom. I'm your parent. I'm your protector. And I've never failed you. You know, these are conversations that we would have to have over and over and over again to build this attachment, build the trust, and to remind her that she was safe in our home."

Trans., *42-43 (Aug. 12, 2020). J.H.M. was distrustful of SCDSS and felt "frightened and

violated” in the past by SCDSS. Trans., *69-70 (Aug. 12, 2020). J.R.M. “would kill animals. And we would have dead birds in the yard. We would have birds from bird’s nest in our yard. We had a lot of chickens and he would accidentally break their backs.” Trans., *43 (Aug. 12, 2020). The frequency of killing animals, lying, and manipulation went up after the SCDSS interviews. Trans., *43-44 (Aug. 12, 2020).

The Appellants also showed the other children became hypervigilant. Trans., *44 (Aug. 12, 2020). C.B.M. would go into the yard and practice martial arts, go into the woods for hours, and pace because of the stress related to SCDSS. Trans., *46 (Aug. 12, 2020). J.T.M. is “aware of the fallout, the observations in our house, the destruction of property, the killing of our animals..., and the cause of family tension. It causes the siblings to...have harsh feelings towards one another.” Trans., *47 (Aug. 12, 2020).

Kaci took A.R.M. and J.W.M. out of school because it affected C.B.M. and Kaci resigned from her employment to home school the children. Trans., *44 (Aug. 12, 2020).

Three of the children have severe psychiatric issues and behavioral issues related to their prior abuse and since 2017, there have been two additional SCDSS investigations. Kaci testified that there was no indication that her adopted children’s mental illnesses and subsequent behaviors would ever go away. Trans., *57 (Aug. 12, 2020). Kaci testified that she had witnessed J.H.M. sexually act out at school. Trans., *77-78 (Aug. 12, 2020).

Kaci May’s children have been diagnosed with PTSD. Trans., *27 (Aug. 12, 2020). L.C.M., age 7, has psychiatric problems and has been committed to MUSC Institute of Psychiatry for thirteen days. Trans., *30-31 (Aug. 12, 2020). There were subsequent SCDSS investigations involving J.H.M. when she was at Three Rivers Residential Treatment Facility and J.R.M. when he was at Palmetto Residential Treatment Facility. Trans., *75-76 (Aug. 12, 2020).

Both J.H.M. and J.R.M. both have issues, at each end of the spectrum, where they distrust others and unconditionally trust strangers. Trans., *27-28 (Aug. 12, 2020). J.H.M. seeks her mother whenever she is in trouble or stressed. Trans., *28 (Aug. 12, 2020). Kaci testified there was no indication that her adopted children's mental illnesses and subsequent behaviors would ever go away. Trans., *57 (Aug. 12, 2020). Kaci testified that she had witnessed J.H.M. sexually act out at school. Trans., *77-78 (Aug. 12, 2020).

Kaci would like to put all of the children back into school. Trans., *49 (Aug. 12, 2020). The children would all like to attend public school. Trans., *49 (Aug. 12, 2020). But because neither SCDSS nor the School District follow the law and the Constitution regarding SCDSS interrogations, she cannot safely allow the children to attend. Trans., *50-51 (Aug. 12, 2020).

All of the children are traumatized by SCDSS because they are afraid that they will be removed from their home. Trans., *26-28 (Aug. 12, 2020).

There is the highest public interest in the due observance of all the constitutional guarantees. *United States v. Raines*, 362 U.S. 17, 27 (1960). It is always in the public interest to prevent the violation of constitutional rights. *G & V Lounge v. Michigan Liquor Control Comm'n*, 23 F.3d 1071, 1079 (6th Cir. 1994).

f. The trial court erred in finding the Appellants would have adequate remedy at law for harm from future interrogations.

The trial court made the following finding:

Plaintiff did not prove that she would have no adequate remedy at law if DSS returned to DD2 to interview her children. Ms. May testified that she told the children that if DSS ever tried to talk to them, they did not have to answer any questions. The children knew that they did not have to talk with DSS and some exercised this right not to answer questions. ARM and CBM both testified that they knew they did not have to talk to DSS unless they wanted to. Moreover, there is no pending DSS case with the family. The underlying DSS case that formed the basis of this lawsuit was resolved in June 2018. DSS has not attempted to speak with any of the May children since November of 2107. If an entirely

speculative future interview is conducted in a tortious or unconstitutional manner, Plaintiff will have adequate remedies at law and equity to address it.

Order, *4 (September 18, 2020)

The application of constitutional protections to school interrogations by SCDSS has not been seriously addressed in the two generations since the Children's Code was passed.

Appellants assert that one of the main reasons is because a damages action for these constitutional violations almost always result in low damages and it would not worth an attorney's time and expense. Public interest law firms have many more serious constitutional issues to address. When the potential damage award for a multitude of violations is insufficient, lawsuits cannot be deemed adequate remedies at law. *Peabody Holding Co. v. Costain Group PLC*, 813 F. Supp. 1402, 1421 (E.D. Mo. 1993) ("Improper conduct for which monetary remedies cannot provide adequate compensation is sufficient to establish [irreparable] harm.").

The victims of these constitutional violations almost always belong to low-income, poorly educated families who have little sophistication to raise objections or little means to challenge the violations in a court of law.

Past wrongs are evidence bearing on whether there is a real and immediate threat of repeated injury. *O'Shea v. Littleton*, 414 U.S. 488, 496 (1974). SCDSS trains its caseworkers to interrogate children at school. SCDSS reported that there were 33,353 child protective services investigations in 2019-2020. SCDSS CPS Referrals for Investigations for State Fiscal Years 2015-2016 through 2019-2020, last accessed at <https://dss.sc.gov/media/2665/6-cps-referrals-for-investigation-5-yr-history-2020.pdf> on April 5, 2021. The number of unchecked civil rights violations is pervasive and staggering. Of those investigations, SCDSS may interrogate each child in each case on multiple occasions. Seven times in this matter. These are not isolated incidents.

Most SCDSS investigations do not end up in the family court. SCDSS CPS Referrals for Investigations for State Fiscal Years 2015-2016 through 2019-2020, last accessed at <https://dss.sc.gov/media/2665/6-cps-referrals-for-investigation-5-yr-history-2020.pdf> on April 5, 2020 (Founded cases for fiscal year 2019-2020 were 8,927 of the 33,353 investigations). And even fewer of the founded cases end up in family court. But even in family court, the seizures, searches, and interrogations of children at school has been institutionalized and our family courts either ignore the violations, *de minimis non curat lex*, or else endorse such unconstitutional acts. There are no judicial or administrative remedies.

There is no doubt that some of the Appellants have severe mental health and behavioral challenges that dramatically increases the likelihood of additional reports of child abuse and neglect to SCDSS. The trial court acknowledged:

Certainly, you have children that have been sexually abused and, obviously, they'll have to deal with that issue for their entire life. And if something happens in the future, certainly, I'm sure DSS will be involved. So I think the parties will probably even stipulate to that fact. And I think that if an allegation of abuse comes up in the future, I pretty much guarantee you they're not going to say that they're not going to investigate.

Trans., *19 (Aug. 12, 2020).

In February 2019 J.H.M. sexually acted out at school by climbing the divider in a bathroom to try to see another student's private parts. Trans., *16, 21-23, 77-78 (Aug. 12, 2020). Three of the children have severe psychiatric issues and behavioral issues related to their prior abuse and since 2017, there have been two additional SCDSS investigations. Kaci testified that there was no indication that her adopted children's mental illnesses and subsequent behaviors would ever go away. Trans., *57 (Aug. 12, 2020). SCDSS even ran a secret investigation on the Mays beginning in December 2017. Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *51-52, 54-57; Trans., *165 (Aug. 11, 2020).

When multiple actions are necessary for legal remedy, injunctive relief is necessary. *Lee v. Bickell*, 292 U.S. 415, 421 (1934) (necessity for multiplicity of actions for legal remedy was sufficient to uphold injunction); *Ecolab, Inc. v. Paolo*, 753 F. Supp. 1100, 1110 (E.D.N.Y. 1991) (“If a plaintiff can receive legal relief only through a multiplicity of lawsuits, plaintiff has suffered irreparable harm sufficient to warrant a preliminary injunction.”); *Hill v. Wallace*, 259 U.S. 44, 62 (1922).

Repeated harmful actions require injunctive relief. *Northeast Women’s Ctr., Inc. v. McMonagle*, 665 F. Supp. 1147, 1153 (E.D. Pa. 1987) (“The legal remedy is inadequate if the plaintiff’s injury is a continuing one, where the last available remedy at law would relegate the plaintiff to filing a separate claim for damages each time it is injured anew.”) (Citing 11 Wright & Miller, at § 2944, at 398. The unchecked unconstitutional policies of SCDSS and the School District mean the Appellant children will have their constitutional rights violated as a matter of course when the next SCDSS intake occurs, until each child ages out, with L.C.M. turning eighteen in 2031.

The issues raised are capable of repetition but evading review. *Curtis v. State*, 345 S.C. 557, 549 S.E.2d 591 (2001). In *Byrd v. Irmo High School*, the Supreme Court observed that its prior decisions had taken a more restrictive approach when applying this exception, holding that the reviewing court could take jurisdiction under the exception only when the duration of the challenged action was too short to be fully litigated prior to its termination and when it was reasonable to expect that the same complaining party would be subjected to the action again. *Byrd v. Irmo High School*, 321 S.C. 426, 468 S.E.2d 861 (1996). The *Byrd* court adopted a less restrictive approach, however, which permitted the exception’s operation when the issue raised was “capable of repetition but evading review, thereby no longer requiring courts to make a

finding concerning the reasonable expectation that the same complaining party would be subjected to the action again. *Id.*; see *State v. Passmore*, 363 S.C. 568, 611 S.E.2d 273 (Ct. App. 2005); *Sloan v. Greenville Cnty.*, 356 S.C. 525, 531, 590 S.E.2d 36, 38 (Ct. App. 2003) (“The party bringing the action need only show the issue raised is capable of repetition and is not required to prove there is a ‘reasonable expectation the issue will arise again.’”). The action must be one which will truly evade review. *Sloan v. Friends of the Hunley, Inc.*, 369 S.C. 20, 630 S.E.2d 474 (2006). See also *Seabrook v. City of Folly Beach*, 337 S.C. 304, 523 S.E.2d 462 (1999) (just because an action is capable of repetition does not automatically imply it will evade review); *City of Charleston v. Masi*, 362 S.C. 505, 609 S.E.2d 301 (2005) (finding the exception inapplicable where the issues raised in the appeal could arise again but would not usually become moot before the court had the opportunity to review them).

If a CPS investigation of an innocent family lasts forty-five days, but a common pleas case challenging the constitutional violation takes one year to get try, these unconstitutional interrogations will never be addressed without applying the mootness exception of, “capable of repetition but evading review”. The record shows that SCDSS has received two subsequent reports and not interrogated the Appellant Children at school. The “voluntary cessation” exception to mootness stems from the concept that “a party should not be able to evade judicial review, or to defeat a judgment, by temporarily altering questionable behavior”, which, in this case, is stopping its policy of interrogating the Appellant children in subsequent abuse and neglect cases in order to evade judicial review. *City News & Novelty, Inc. v. City of Waukesha*, 531 U.S. 278, 284 n.1 (2001). See Plt. Tr. Ex. 1, Dictation, *50-52, 54-57.

This matter imposes questions of imperative and manifest urgency to establish a rule for future conduct in matters of important public interest. *Curtis v. State*, 345 S.C. 557, 549 S.E.2d

591 (2001); *Holden v. Cribb*, 349 S.C. 132, 561 S.E.2d 634 (2002). In *Ashmore v. Greater Greenville Sewer District*, the Supreme Court explained the rationale behind the exception, opining:

If this were an ordinary case, our opinion might well stop here...But the case is not an ordinary one: it is not a private controversy between individuals, as such. On the contrary, it is defended by an intended governmental agency which the legislature undertook to create by their enactments: and raised on the record are earnestly argued public questions of importance. The last stated factor brings into play the principle, now generally established, that questions of public interest originally encompassed in an action should be decided for future guidance. however abstract or moot they may have become in the immediate contest.

Ashmore v. Greater Greenville Sewer District, 211 S.C. 77, 44 S.E.2d 88 (1947); see also *Sloan v. Greenville Cnty.*, 356 S.C. 531, 590 S.E.2d 338 (Ct. App. 2003) (stating in regard to a matter concerning the stewardship of public funds, “[o]ur inability to provide any effective relief in this case should not be a barrier to the courts consideration of this question of exceptional public interest”).

In this matter, both SCDSS and the School District Defendants assert that SCDSS is allowed to interrogate any child at any time without reasonable suspicion or probable cause. They have operated this way since SCDSS was established. They are still doing it. They will continue to violate children’s First, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution. They will continue to violate the privacy rights of the families of South Carolina. They will continue to violate rights of children under the South Carolina Constitution delineated in Article I, §§ 3, 10, and 12.

In *Mann v. Cty. of San Diego*, the United States District Court found, “Because the Mann children are still minors living in San Diego County, they remain subject to the possible jurisdiction of the County's child welfare system, and therefore it is not “absolutely clear that the allegedly wrongful behavior could not reasonably be expected to recur.” *Mann v. Cty. of San*

Diego, 907 F.3d 1154, 1164 n. 12 (9th Cir. 2018) (Citing *United States v. Concentrated Phosphate Export Ass'n, Inc.*, 393 U.S. 199, 203 (1968).).

The May children that were chronically abused before coming into SCDSS custody and while in SCDSS custody continue to have mental health and behavioral issues. These issues will ebb and flow as the children mature, physically, psychologically, and sexually. Whether SCDSS investigations will happen again has been answered – two subsequent investigations are mentioned in the record. There are more. That the Mays will be involved again with SCDSS, despite doing nothing wrong, has been proven. This is part and parcel with the adoption of children with special needs and prior abuse issues. It would be more shocking if there were no reports in the future.

Conclusion and Relief Requested

The Appellants ask the Court to address a difficult issue. As South Carolinians, we are all charged with eliminating child abuse in our communities. But these concerns should never override children's and families' constitutional protections.

The unrestricted intrusion into the lives of South Carolina's children and families by SCDSS's interrogations must be limited by the Court. A bright line must be drawn to place SCDSS on notice that it must have probable cause to seize, search, and interrogate our children. The interrogations of the Appellant children were nothing short of state-sponsored fishing expeditions into the private affairs of the Appellants. SCDSS had nothing. SCDSS knew it was not allowed in the May home and it was not allowed to interrogate the Appellant children. Compulsory schooling should not be viewed as a means to skirt children's and families' constitutional protections, especially after families have affirmatively asserted their rights.

SCDSS, the School District, and the family courts already have the statutory procedures

for the Defendants to follow the law. The Defendants have chosen not to follow the law and they have told the Appellants, the Courts, and all South Carolinians, “make us follow the law”.

The Appellants ask the Court for the following relief:

1. Reverse and remand this matter for a new trial.
2. Award attorneys’ fees and costs pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF COUNSEL

The undersigned counsel for the Appellants certifies that the Initial Brief of Appellant complies with Rule 208, SCACR.

Respectfully submitted,

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