



CATAWBA COUNTY

P.O. BOX 669 Newton, North Carolina 28658-0669 (828) 695-5600 **Catawba County Social Services**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: February 21, 2011

CONTACT: Margaret Allen, Catawba County Social Services Public Information Officer, mallen@catawbacountync.gov, 828-695-6583.

The following statement is pursuant with North Carolina General Statute (NCGS) 7B-2902. In compliance with state confidentiality laws, Catawba County Social Services cannot issue any further statements about this case.

Summary of Services on Zahra Baker:

On July 13, 2010 at 4pm, Catawba County Social Services (CCSS) received a Child Protective Services report request to assist Caldwell County Social Services. We were informed that Caldwell County Social Services had attempted to initiate a report that they received regarding the Baker family on July 12, 2010. However, they found no one at the Caldwell address and were informed by a neighbor that the family had moved to Catawba County. When it was determined that the family had a residence in Catawba County, the case was transferred to CCSS. **Prior to responding to the July 13, 2010 report, CCSS had no history with Zahra Baker.**

An unannounced visit was made to the Baker home, located at 21st Avenue NW in Hickory on July 13, 2010 at 6:18 pm. The family's belongings were not fully unpacked due to the Bakers' recent move to Hickory. The stepmother, father, and Zahra Baker were all interviewed independently. There were no other minor children in the family.

Thereafter, CCSS visited the home on July 22, 2010 and August 5, 2010. CCSS also obtained statements from all persons named at the time of the report who may have had knowledge of the situation.

Pursuant to NCGS 7B, the family assessment was completed. There was no evidence of maltreatment or child safety issues found during the assessment. Therefore, the case was closed on August 6, 2010. No other reports were received until after the disappearance of Zahra.

The Hickory Police Department contacted CCSS on Saturday, October 9, 2010 to assess whether the agency was actively involved with Zahra. CCSS had no open case. Hickory Police then made a new report on October 12, 2010 stating that Zahra was missing from the home and that they suspected possible parental neglect. CCSS partnered with Hickory Police until Zahra's death was confirmed. As a result, the case was closed on November 19, 2010.