January 9, 2015

Mr. John Eller, Director
Catawba County Department of Social Services
PO Box 669
Newton, North Carolina 28658

Mr. Will Wakefield, Director
Caldwell County Department of Social Services
PO Box 200
Lenoir, North Carolina 28645

Dear Mr. Eller and Mr. Wakefield:

Attached is the final report from the child fatality review conducted by the State Child Fatality Review Team in August 2013 regarding the death of Zahra Baker. The State Child Fatality Review Team is statutorily required to assemble an ad hoc multidisciplinary team of professionals to identify factors which may have contributed to conditions leading up to the fatality and develop recommendations for improving coordination in the State and local child welfare services systems. The attached report contains pertinent findings and recommendations after examination of the circumstances surrounding Zahra’s death. The North Carolina Division of Social Services assumes the responsibility for distributing the report after the Team reaches consensus on the findings and recommendations. The findings in this report are based on the examination of all records related to this specific case and are not necessarily indicative of any agency’s standard practice in Catawba and Caldwell Counties.

The Community Child Protection Teams can respond in writing to any issues discussed in this report. Written responses will become a part of the report and will be maintained in the Division’s files. This report is available to the public upon written request. Please send any responses to:

Mr. Jeff Olson, Local Support Team
North Carolina Division of Social Services
2439 Mail Service Center
325 North Salisbury Street
Raleigh, NC 27699-2439
Division of Social Services representatives will follow up within six months of the release of this report to review progress in implementing the local changes. Technical assistance is available to the Catawba and Caldwell County Departments of Social Services and the Community Child Protection Team to address the report’s recommendations.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Jeff Olson at (919) 527-6404.

Sincerely,

Kevin Kelley, MSW, Section Chief
Child Welfare Section
North Carolina Division of Social Services

Attachment: Fatality Report

Cc:
Carolyn Page, North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation
Gerri Mattson MD, Medical Director, Division of Public Health, Children and Youth
Susan Robinson, North Carolina Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services/Child and Family Services
Brenda Edwards, State Coordinator of local Child Fatality Prevention Teams
Stephanie Nantz, Department of Administration, Youth Advocacy and Involvement
Elaine Cabinum-Foeller MD, Medical Director, TEDI BEAR Children’s Advocacy Center at Brody School of Medicine, East Carolina University
Catherine Joyner, Child Maltreatment Prevention Leadership Team, Division of Public Health
Lisa Mayhew, North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Deborah Radisch MD, Chief Medical Examiner, North Carolina Office of Chief Medical Examiner
Anne Middleton, Public Appointee to the Child Fatality Prevention Team
Chris Minard, Allied Health Consultant, Department of Public Instruction
Vanessa Totten, Assistant Attorney General
Trishana Jones, North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence
McKenzie Beamer, North Carolina Division of Emergency Services