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Statement on Behalf of Sara Wood: Former Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) Case Manager Facing Criminal Charges

We are submitting this statement on behalf of Sara Wood, a former Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) assessment worker with an exemplary record of public service of approximately 2.5 years, who now faces retaliatory criminal charges. These charges are brought despite a well-documented and heavily reported-upon pattern of DCS overburdening and mismanaging frontline workers, such as Mrs. Wood. These charges are a blatant act of retaliation by DCS officials following Mrs. Woods filing of a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

At the time of the alleged conduct, Mrs. Woods was assigned a caseload more than double the national and state-recommended standard. Indiana law (I.C. 31-25-2-5) has capped caseloads at 12 for initial assessments since 2006. While the statute requires DCS leadership to “ensure” those standards are kept, they are simply ignored. Throughout her employment, our client was forced to handle well over 25 cases at once, all while supervising a trainee and managing that individual’s caseload as well.

Despite Mrs. Woods raising repeated and urgent concerns to supervisors and upper management, DCS took no action to reduce her caseload or provide reasonable support. Instead, she was wrongfully terminated and singled out for criminal prosecution—a move that is both

punitive and wholly inconsistent with agency practices involving other similarly situated employees.

This retaliatory action comes amid an escalating pattern of systemic failure and public controversy within Indiana DCS. In 2017, then Director of DCS, Mary Beth Bonaventura, warned in her very public letter of resignation that DCS would find itself in the position it is in. Unfortunately, her predictions were spot on.

Our client is being targeted not because of alleged three inaccurate record notes, but because she refused to remain silent. These charges should be seen for what they are: a desperate and pathetic attempt to deflect blame from the agency's leadership by criminalizing overworked and unsupported staff. We call on the public, lawmakers, and members of the media to demand accountability from DCS leadership, not those who risked their own well-being to protect Indiana's children under impossible conditions.

We will vigorously defend her innocence in court and will highlight the epic failure that is the DCS leadership in doing so. Any future statements or comments on Sara Wood's behalf will take place exclusively through pleadings and argument in the criminal proceedings.