



Wake County Department of Human Services  
220 Swinburne Street  
Raleigh, NC 27620

March 6, 2006

**Statement by Warren Ludwig, Director of Child Welfare Services with Wake County Human Services**

**Re: Child Protective Services Involvement with Sean (Ford) Paddock**

Wake County social workers are deeply saddened by the death of Sean Paddock, known to our staff as Sean Ford. We are sad for all the family members involved, and especially for Sean and his siblings.

Our staff cared deeply about Sean and his siblings and worked hard on their behalf.

We are committed to learning from what happened to Sean. We will conduct internal reviews, and we will participate in reviews that will take place with our Community Child Protection Team and the State Child Fatality Review process.

**Disclosure**

In compliance with North Carolina General Statute 7B-2902, Wake County is releasing a written summary of findings and information concerning Child Protective Services actions with Sean Paddock.

Although General Statute 108A-80 generally prohibits Wake County from releasing any information about services to specific individuals, General Statute 7B-2902 states that a public agency shall, upon request, disclose a written summary of specified information and findings related to a child fatality when a person has been criminally charged with having caused the fatality. Sean Paddock's adoptive mother, Lynn Paddock, has been charged with his death, and Wake County Human Services has received a request to release information.

Wake County Child Protective Services (CPS) was providing CPS Treatment Services to Sean Paddock's three older siblings when Sean was born one month prematurely on September 3, 2001. CPS services were being provided as a result of a finding that Sean's father, Dwayne Ford, used inappropriate discipline on his stepson (Sean's half sibling) earlier in 2001. CPS services were provided to the family continuously through December of 2003. During this time, social workers visited the family at least monthly and addressed multiple issues identified by ongoing assessments of the safety and well being of the children. The family had difficulty maintaining a stable residence, and their dwellings were sometimes unclean and sometimes presented safety hazards for young children. Concerns were repeatedly expressed about the children's hygiene, and domestic violence was reported between the parents. At various times, the children stayed with relatives and then returned to the parents. Services provided to the family included coaching and safety plans concerning use of discipline; specialized parenting

classes for Sean's mother, Georgia Ford; coaching on finding and maintaining appropriate housing; transportation assistance; assistance applying for and accessing benefits such as child care, WIC, food stamps and other financial benefits; assistance accessing developmental evaluations and follow-up services for the children and domestic violence classes for the father. Services were ultimately not successful in addressing the major issues of concern.

Two new CPS reports were received and investigated while the family was receiving CPS Treatment Services. On September 11, 2002, Wake County CPS received a report that the children were consistently filthy. The investigation was completed and was unsubstantiated because the family seemed to be making substantial progress on hygiene issues.

On December 3, 2002, Wake County CPS received a report that Sean arrived at day care shivering with his lips blue and that the reporter was concerned about the safety of all the children living in a cold, unheated house. CPS found the house to be freezing, found a heater installed in such a way as to be a serious fire hazard, and found the house to be very unsanitary. During the month, the family placed Sean and two of his siblings at the home of his paternal uncle, Ronald Ford, Jr.

On January 2, 2003, Wake County filed a petition to take legal custody of Sean and his three siblings. The older half sibling remained in the home of a relative on the paternal side of his family, and physical custody of Sean and two of his siblings remained with the paternal uncle. Initially, the parents were allowed to visit the children under their relatives' supervision. Social workers assisted the relatives with accessing day care and clothing for the children.

After Wake County petitioned for custody on January 2, 2003, a guardian ad litem was appointed to advocate for the best interests of the children, and Wake County's actions with the Ford family came under the jurisdiction and supervision of the Juvenile Court. Judicial supervision was exercised through a series of hearings in which Wake County, the parents, and the guardian ad litem all had the opportunity to present evidence and make recommendations to the court. A non-secure custody hearing was held in Juvenile Court January 7, 2005, which temporarily sanctioned Wake County's custody of the children.

After the children were out of their parents' home, two of the children reported being molested by their father. On January 24, 2003, Wake County CPS received a report that one of Sean's siblings was describing sexual abuse by Sean's father, Dwayne Ford. This report was shared with law enforcement, and the children's contact with the father was discontinued. The allegation was substantiated. Sean was also substantiated as neglected by his parents on the basis of his being in an injurious environment where sexual abuse of another child had occurred.

On March 19, 2003, Wake County CPS received a report that Sean's father, Dwayne Ford, had sexually abused a second of Sean's siblings. This report also was shared with law enforcement and investigated. The allegation of sexual abuse was substantiated, and neglect of Sean was again substantiated on the basis of his being in an injurious environment.

Throughout their time in foster care, the children were provided with health, developmental and mental health assessments and treatment consistent with their needs.

In late March 2003, the children's uncle, Ronald Ford, and his wife said having the three children stay with them was too overwhelming and asked Wake County to move the children from their home at the end of the school year. A foster home was found for the children, but the prospective foster parents determined after visits that it would be too challenging to keep all three children. A therapeutic foster home licensed by Caring Family Network was identified, and Sean and his two siblings were placed there in late June. Ongoing visits were set up with their older half sibling and with the paternal aunt and uncle with whom they had lived for six months.

Wake County offered services to the parents to attempt to prepare them to reunify safely with their children. After the allegations of sexual abuse necessitated suspension of visits supervised by the relatives, Wake County supervised visits between the children and the mother. Both parents were referred to parenting classes, and the father was additionally expected to complete a domestic violence program. As part of efforts to prepare the parents for reunification with their children, social workers continued to visit the parents' home. An April home visit found the home to be extremely unsanitary without water or power. At the adjudication hearing that began May 15, 2003, and was completed July 17, 2003, the judge ruled that all four children were abused, neglected and dependent, and ordered a plan of services aimed at giving the parents an opportunity to reunify with their children.

After being jailed in March 2003, the father, Dwayne Ford, pled guilty to a single count of indecent liberties with a minor in August 2003. He was released from jail, placed on 36 months probation, and ordered to have no contact with his minor children during his probation. Citing economic difficulties, Mr. Ford moved back into the house. A September visit found the home still appearing to be in severe disrepair from the outside. In October, the Fords were making progress cleaning and fixing up the house. However, the father and mother remained together in the home.

At a court hearing October 28, 2003, Wake County recommended that the mother establish a suitable residence separate from the father if she wanted to prepare for the children to return, and the juvenile court so ordered. The children's mother, Georgia Ford, did not believe her children's allegations of sexual abuse against their father. She was offered group services for non-offending parents of children who have been sexually abused, but she did not participate, citing conflicts with her work schedule. Wake County provided the father, Dwayne Ford, with evaluation and treatment specifically appropriate to individuals who have committed sexual offenses. While Mr. Ford participated in treatment and initially admitted the abuse, he subsequently minimized his behavior and did not successfully complete treatment. He also did not move out of the residence with his wife.

At a January 6, 2004 hearing, the juvenile court relieved Wake County of further efforts to reunify the children with the parents and endorsed a plan of granting legal custody to relatives and a concurrent plan of adoption.

On March 24, 2004, Wake County filed a petition to terminate the parental rights of Dwayne and Georgia Ford. At a court hearing April 6, 2004, Wake County recommended that the plan for the

children be changed to adoption. Wake County reported that none of the children's relatives were currently able and appropriate to care for Sean and his two full siblings. Some of the maternal relatives were not able to provide a home for the children, and others were perceived as inappropriate caregivers due to their disbelief of the children's disclosures of sexual abuse. Wake County reported the paternal relatives who had provided care in the past continued to be unable to do so. After hearing from all parties, the court ordered the county to pursue termination of parental rights and a plan of adoption for the children.

On July 22, 2004, the parents formally and voluntarily relinquished their parental rights. At a hearing September 28, 2004, the court ordered Wake County to proceed with the plan of seeking an adoptive family for Sean and his two full siblings.

On October 20, 2004, Wake County CPS received a report that one of Sean's siblings was being physically abused in the therapeutic foster home licensed by Caring Family Network. Law enforcement was notified and participated in the investigation. The investigation found that the child was not being abused. However, several issues of concern were presented to the foster parents and the licensing agency. These issues included use of corporal punishment (which is not allowed in foster homes) and concerns about hygiene and communication with the schools. On November 19, 2004, Wake County CPS received another report of suspected maltreatment by the therapeutic foster parents. This report was not accepted for investigation because the allegations had already been investigated.

Children's Home Society, a well established adoption agency in North Carolina, notified Wake County that it had a potential adoptive family that might be a good match for Sean and his two siblings. Children's Home Society provided a detailed adoptive home study. The Paddocks lived in a farmhouse on 12 acres of land in rural Johnston County. The Paddocks were a licensed foster home that had already successfully adopted three children and had been successful working with children with special needs. Additionally, a biological child of Mr. Paddock by a previous marriage lived in the home. The Children's Home Society's licensing worker had known and worked with the Paddocks for 10 years and spoke very highly of them.

An adoption team meeting was held with the Paddocks and four Wake County staff on November 2, 2004. A second meeting was held December 2, 2004, involving Wake County staff, the Children's Home Society licensing worker, and the Guardian ad litem to discuss a number of issues and questions about the possible adoptive placement. These issues included the challenge of adopting three children with four children already in the home. Balanced against this concern was the Paddock's track record of success adopting children, which was seen as a strength. Subsequently, a Wake County social worker and supervisor and the guardian ad litem visited the Paddock home. In late December, the children's social worker met with Sean's two older siblings and their therapist to discuss meeting a family that might want to adopt them and Sean. An initial visit was set up in early January, and visits continued and became more extended during the month. At a meeting Monday, January 24, 2005, Wake County staff decided to go forward with the adoptive placement the next weekend.

On January 26, 2005, Wake County CPS received information about possible maltreatment of Sean, then age 3, on a visit the previous weekend to the prospective adoptive home. The

supervising social worker asked for more detailed information. The information available on January 26 was screened as not sufficient to constitute a report for investigation.

On January 27, additional information was received and was screened as a report of neglect--improper discipline. The report included the following information: when Ms. Paddock returned the children to the foster home Sunday evening, January 23, she told the foster mother that Sean had fallen off a bed and bruised his bottom. However, Sean reported to his foster mother Monday that Ms. Paddock had spanked him in the bathroom for playing with a dog. Additionally, the children were stating that Sean was not allowed to eat because he did not want to jump on a trampoline.

Wake County contacted Johnston County for assistance with the investigation. After considerable discussion, it was determined Johnston County would conduct a family assessment of the Paddock family with respect to the Paddock children and would provide information from that assessment as an assist to Wake County, which would be responsible for making the case decision on the Ford children. Wake County would provide information from its interviews of the Ford children to Johnston County to assist them in making a case decision on the Paddock children. Over the next few weeks, Wake and Johnston County staff had multiple telephone contacts to share information.

Later on January 27, a Wake County CPS investigator interviewed Sean and his two siblings in three separate interviews at their day care and after-school program. Sean stated that he got in trouble at the Paddocks and that Mrs. Paddock had hit him. He could not say what she hit him with or in what room it took place. He said he was fed during the visit. He allowed the social worker to look at the bruise on his bottom. Both of Sean's siblings reported that he had been spanked during the visit to the Paddocks, though neither reported seeing the spanking. One of the siblings reported Ms. Paddock spanked Sean with her hand because he was messing with the dog. The other sibling reported he knew Sean got spanked because his foster mother pulled down Sean's pants and saw the bruise. Both siblings also reported that Sean did not get to eat lunch one day because he did not want to jump on the Paddock's rebounder (miniature trampoline) for exercise, although one of the siblings reported Ms. Paddock fed Sean after helping him jump. Both siblings expressed diminished enthusiasm for the Paddocks. The CPS investigator also spoke to the day care director who reported that the two siblings had told her they had a good time at the Paddocks but that Sean did not get to eat lunch one day because he did not want to use the rebounder. She also reported Sean told her that Ms. Paddock took him into the bathroom and spanked him.

On January 28, a meeting was held in which it was decided to delay the adoptive placement pending more information about the allegations of inappropriate discipline. At the meeting, a voice mail message from three-year old Sean was played in which the foster mother could be heard whispering to him to tell his social worker that he did not want to go live with the Paddocks. This message had been left on the social worker's voice mail prior to the report. Wake County social workers became concerned that the children's statements about Sean being spanked might have been influenced by the foster mother's prompts.

On January 29, the children's foster care social worker (not the social worker conducting the investigation) took the children out to talk with them to try to gauge their feelings about and comfort with the Paddocks. The children expressed feeling safe there and being excited about living there.

On January 31, Wake County contacted Children's Home Society to discuss the issues raised in the report. Wake County requested a written incident report which was delivered that same day. The incident report described Sean having a temper tantrum when asked to jump on the rebounder and various efforts made by Ms. Paddock to help him calm down including putting him to bed first on the bottom and then on the middle bunk of a 3-bunk bed. She reported hearing a noise and finding that Sean had fallen from the middle bunk. At that point Sean said he wanted to sleep and did go to sleep. Ms. Paddock reported not discovering that he had a bruise until giving him a bath the next night. She reported informing the foster mother of the bruise upon returning him to that residence. Wake County also requested that Children's Home Society verify that Mr. and Mrs. Paddock had signed an agreement not to use corporal discipline, and this was verified. Wake County requested that Children's Home Society reiterate this agreement and ensure that no physical discipline was used.

In the next few weeks, ongoing discussions took place between the children's Wake County social worker, her supervisor, and occasionally the program manager.

In early February, the decision was made to resume visits between the children and the Paddocks with the condition that the Children's Home Society worker be present during the visits. A Wake County social worker and the guardian ad litem also attended the first visit, which occurred February 10, 2005.

On March 9, Johnston County gave Wake County a verbal summary of their completed assessment. They found no evidence to support the allegations and were making a finding of no services needed for the Paddock children. They found it more likely that Sean had slept through lunch (after getting upset) rather than being denied lunch. They found that it was not likely that Sean had been disciplined and that the bruise more likely came from falling off a bunk bed as reported by Ms. Paddock. Wake County social workers agreed with the Johnston County findings and concurred that Sean's bruise had likely come from the bunk bed rather than from any discipline.

On March 10, it was agreed the children would move into their adoptive placement on March 11. The social worker met with the children and their therapist and communicated with the guardian ad litem. She also spoke with the Children's Home Society Social Worker, who would be responsible for ongoing supervision of the adoptive placement until the adoption was finalized. On March 11, the Wake County social worker met the Paddocks at the foster home and helped them move the children to the Paddock's residence. On March 21, the Wake County social worker made another visit to the Paddock home to check on the children.

On March 22, 2005, the Ford case was reviewed again by the Juvenile Court. Wake County presented to the court that an adoptive home had been found for Sean and his two siblings; that the adoptive placement had been delayed while a report of improper discipline was investigated;

that the report was not substantiated; and that the children were now living with the adoptive family. In response to an inquiry from the court, Wake County reported it believed Sean's injury was the result of a fall from the bunk bed. The court ordered Wake County to proceed with the plan of adoption and set the next review for September 2005 unless the adoption petition was filed prior to September, in which case the court stated there would be no further reviews.

After the adoptive placement, the Children's Home Society social worker visited the Paddock family monthly in March, April, May, June and July of 2005. At each visit, the social worker observed the home, talked to the parents, and talked with each of the Ford children. The children appeared to talk freely and to be adjusting well. The social worker also discussed and planned for the children's educational and service needs with Ms. Paddock. Wake County maintained contact with Children's Home Society and assisted Children's Home Society in completing paperwork for the final adoption decree. The adoption decree was issued by the Johnston County Clerk of Superior Court on July 22, 2005, finalizing the adoption and ending Wake County's legal custody of the children.

Following the adoption, post-adoption services were available to the Paddocks at their option through Children's Home Society. The Paddocks have received monthly adoption assistance payments from the state. Wake County had no direct contact with the Paddocks after the adoption decree but did send them an adoption handbook, age appropriate books to assist them in talking to children about adoption, and a monthly adoption newsletter than Wake County publishes for adoptive families.

**Explanatory note.**

It was reported in the press that the paternal uncle, Ronald Ford, Jr., told Wake County CPS that Sean returned from a visit to the Paddock's farmhouse with welts on his backside and legs just weeks before the adoption. We have reviewed our records and spoken to Mr. Ford about this issue. Mr. Ford's information came from the foster parent, and we believe she informed him of the same bruise that resulted in the CPS investigation that was initiated on January 27, 2005.

**To reach Warren Ludwig, call 212-8447.**