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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ericka J. Whitaker, CEO of Southeastern Community & Family Services, Releases Statement in Response to Department of Justice Lawsuit Against the Agency

Lumberton, NC – Southeastern Community & Family Services, Inc.'s (SCFS) Chief Executive Officer, Ericka J. Whitaker, provided the following statement in response to the Department of Justice's lawsuit against the agency.

Statement Issued by Ericka J. Whitaker, Chief Executive Officer

"Today, we received notification from our attorney that the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has filed a lawsuit against Southeastern Community & Family Services relating to the ongoing HUD Section 8 housing investigation that has been in litigation since 2012.

Per a statement released by DOJ, the complaint alleges that John Wesley and Eric Pender, employees of SCFS, have subjected voucher program participants and applicants to unwanted sexual comments, sexual touching and other sexual acts, conditioned or offered Section 8 benefits in exchange for sexual acts and took adverse housing actions against those who rebuffed their sexual advances.

It is important that I make clear.....John Wesley and Eric Pender have not been legally charged with any of the pending allegations of this lawsuit, therefore neither have been terminated from the agency. However, due to the allegations, I felt that it was critical to put these preventive measures in place:

- *In 2014, the agency revised its sexual harassment policy, which states, Acts of sexual harassment by employees, supervisors, and managers are prohibited employment practices and are subject to disciplinary measures.*
- *In February 2014, the agency created a new position and appointed a Director of Programs to oversee all administrative and program functions of the HUD Section 8 program to ensure proper management and compliance to grantors' guidelines.*
- *In July 2014, the agency hired a new Office Manager/Housing Inspector to oversee the day-to-day program activities of SCFS' HUD Section 8 housing office in Laurinburg. Due to limited funding, Eric Pender was placed on administrative suspension without pay to accommodate the new Office Manager's position. Pender remains on suspension.*
- *In July 2014, security cameras were installed throughout the agency, including the HUD Section 8 office that monitors activity 24 hours a day, seven days a week.*



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- *HUD Section 8 program procedures were established to require that John Wesley, Housing Coordinator, be accompanied by the Office Manager (a female employee) **if** there is a need for him to do a home/site visit.*

The agency has been servicing clients through the HUD Section 8 housing program for 35 years. In the last year, the agency served over 400 families per month under the program. We remain committed to providing services to those who are in need.”

About Southeastern Community & Family Services, Inc.

Southeastern Community & Family Services, Inc. (SCFS) is a federally funded nonprofit agency based in Lumberton, North Carolina serving low income residents in seven neighboring counties for nearly 50 years. The Agency has over 200 employees and an approximate annual budget of \$16 million utilized to operate and manage 15 Head Start schools, HUD Section 8 housing, and other programs involving workforce readiness, economic development, and self-sufficiency.

To learn more about SCFS programs and services, and to keep up with the Agency’s latest news and announcements, you may visit www.SCFSNC.org.

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