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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Re: Statement of Attorney Gedney M. Howe IV on Behalf of Zach Deacon
and the Deacon Family

The Deacon family and I were deeply disheartened by Sheriff Carl Ritchie's exclusive interview with ABC News 4. Speaking publicly, the Sheriff vouched for his office's handling of this case. He told viewers that deputies checked on the children, that the children were doing well, and that his office stands behind its deputy. He did this less than 48 hours before the girl's funeral. His office has also given the public a detailed account of the calls and visits to the Pinewood Drive home, including a list of the dates deputies responded.

Meanwhile, my efforts on behalf of Emory and Harlow's father to review that same file have met little success. That file includes the investigation conducted before the girls' deaths and the records underlying Zach's own arrest. I have been told the file is still being assembled, that it is not ready, that it must first be reviewed and redacted, and that the Sheriff's Office is not sure what it can share with us. Yet Sheriff Ritchie has gone on television and characterized what that file shows. The Sheriff cannot tell the public the file is complete enough to reach conclusions while telling the children's father it is not ready for him to see.

The Sheriff's office has said that there were no calls for service directly to the home between the last time contact was made and the time Emory and Harlow were found. The Sheriff office has also claimed that last contact was both the 20th and the 22nd. This is demonstrably false and the Charleston County Sheriff Office knows that. We have spoken with the witnesses who called for help during that time, and we know what they reported. The public record also includes a deputy's radio transmission saying deputies were "no longer conducting welfare checks at that address." The Sheriff's Office says that decision followed supervisory direction, but it has not said who gave that direction or why.

GEDNEY M. HOWE, JR.
(1914-1981)

GEDNEY M. HOWE, III
(1946-2025)

The Deacon family's trust in the Charleston County Sheriff's Office has been irreparably damaged. The Sheriff's public statements have only deepened that damage.

Sheriff Ritchie has expressed great confidence in his office's handling of this case. On behalf of the Deacon family, I am calling on him to do the right thing and formally invite the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) to independently review:

- Zach's arrest for calling 911: the basis, who authorized it, and whether it was lawful;
- The decision to stop welfare checks: who directed it, when, and on what basis;
- How deputies handled each of the 21 calls and 13+ responses, Aug. 10 through Sept. 29, including what they documented and what they saw;
- Coordination with DSS and Mobile Crisis, and any emergency protective custody (EPC) assessment that was or wasn't made;
- Whether records and video from those contacts have been fully preserved and kept unaltered;
- Their compliance, professionalism, and thoroughness throughout.

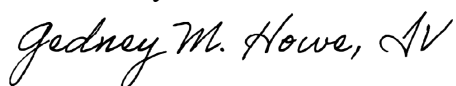
SLED's Child Fatalities Unit is already assisting in the case against Justine May. That is not what we are asking for. We are asking for an independent investigation of how the Charleston County Sheriff's Office handled this family in the weeks before Emory and Harlow died. That includes why it arrested their father for calling 911, who directed deputies to stop checking on the children, and what deputies saw and did on each of their visits to the home.

Under S.C. Code § 23-3-15, SLED has statewide jurisdiction over criminal investigations, and by its own stated practice, it steps into local matters when the local agency asks. That request is Sheriff Ritchie's to make. If he is as confident in his office's conduct as he says he is, he should make it today. If he will not, we call on the Ninth Circuit Solicitor, the Attorney General, or the Governor to request it.

Right now, the only review of CCSO's conduct is being done by CCSO's own Office of Professional Standards. No agency cannot credibly investigate itself, least of all when its Sheriff has already gone on television and defended it. On the campaign trail in 2024 Sheriff Ritchie said, "Charleston County deserves accountability and transparency from its Sheriff. We need change." I could not agree more.

Emory and Harlow deserve the truth. Their father deserves to see the file, not to learn about the case on the news.

Sincerely,



Gedney M. Howe, IV