



City of Beaufort, South Carolina

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February 21, 2025

Open Letter from the City Council of the City of Beaufort, South Carolina

We would like to take this opportunity to address concerns that each of us have fielded individually, and as an elected body, surrounding the case of two runaway children this week. First and foremost, we are relieved and thankful that both children were found safe and unharmed, with no injuries. It took the efforts of many different organizations and law enforcement agencies to get to this outcome; with the Beaufort Police Department leading the way.

A majority of concerns from citizens that have been expressed to us, and voluminous social media posts and comments were, and continue to be, critical of the City of Beaufort Police Department. This is unfortunate and misguided, and we will explain why this is so.

First, we will address the accusation that the Police Department refused to investigate or do anything in response to the apparent runaway. From the time the first child was reported missing at approximately 9:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, February 16 until both children were found safe on Wednesday, February 19 at approximately 11:00 a.m., no less than six Beaufort police officers were working this case. These officers were interacting with the families of the children, known associates of the families and other law enforcement agencies. The law enforcement agencies included the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, Beaufort County Sheriff's Office, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Cooksville Tennessee law enforcement officials, and the Florida Highway Patrol. Advanced vehicle detection technology was employed which allowed the Beaufort Police Department to periodically track the vehicle the children were believed to be in and communicate that information instantly to other law enforcement agencies. This technology was requested by Chief Stephenie Price, included in the City Manager's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request and was deployed this year.

We have also received feedback that the Police Department should have used the AMBER alerting system, and that this incident should have been considered an abduction and not a runaway case. AMBER alerts in South Carolina must be approved and issued by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED). The possibility of issuing an alert was discussed with SLED officials and this case did not meet the requisite criteria for an AMBER alert. The first requisite criterion is that the child must have been abducted, i.e., taken against her will. There was every indication that the child had not been taken against her will, but rather that she left willingly with the other child, a known associate, who was also reported as a runaway. This was determined from clear evidence in the home and extensive information gathered from subjects who were interviewed.

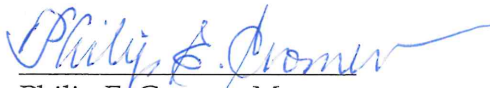
We have heard accusations that the Police Department was not talking to the parents of the runaway children. This is also false. Attached to this email you will find a document which contains the Police Department's protocol in response to a reported runaway and a synopsis of activities associated with this case. The synopsis shows frequent contact with the family and

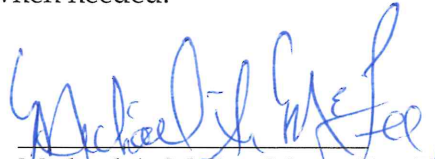
other major actions performed. Every instance of documented contact is verifiable through communication records.

Chief Price has been accused of “gaslighting” the father of the younger runaway child over why he was not in Florida. It is true that she suggested to him that he may be of more help to his daughter if he was in Florida, where the Police Department had received numerous hits on the vehicle in which the two runaways were believed to be traveling. She explained that his presence there and the ability to personally interact with local law enforcement agencies, identify any patterns, nuances and file documents--as the parent--might be of more value when the children were located in Florida.

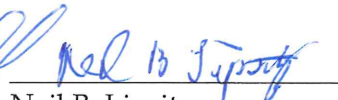
Given the sum of what we have learned about this case, we have no misgivings that the Police Department treated this case with as much care, diligence, compassion and personal attention to the family as other cases of this nature – perhaps even more so given the public outcry in response to the misinformation on social media.

We continue to have confidence in our Police Chief’s leadership and in our City Manager to hold the Chief and the Police Department accountable when needed.


Philip E. Cromer, Mayor


Michael A. McFee, Mayor Pro-Tem


Harold “Mitch” Mitchell


Neil B. Lipsitz


Phillip “Josh” Scallate

Enclosure

Patrol Response & Initial Investigation Outline

1. Patrol Response & Initial Investigation

- **Gather Pertinent Information/Determine if the juvenile is endangered**
 - Last known location
 - Last time seen
 - Clothing description
 - School attended/last school attended.
 - Friends/associates
 - Sports or group affiliations.
 - Daily routine & commonly frequented locations
 - Medical issues (mental health concerns, medications, etc.)
 - Notify appropriate Local, State, and Federal authorities and agencies.
 - Circumstances and potential risk factors- If the child is endangered or abducted contact SLED to issue an Amber Alert/Safety advisory.
 - Entered into NCIC/Missing Runaway/Endangered.

2. Investigative Actions & Canvassing

- Canvass the area:
 - Speak with friends, neighbors, witnesses
 - Check known frequented locations
- Review the juvenile's social media activity
- Check electronic devices (phones, tablets, computers)
- Obtain parental permission to search the juvenile's house/room
- Review behavioral history, including any prior runaway incidents, and school history, and contact School Resource Officer

3. NCIC Entry & Notifications

- Enter the juvenile into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) as a missing person
- If a vehicle is affiliated, input into NCIC with alerts
- Issue BOLO (Be on the Lookout) for officers and surrounding agencies

4. Departmental & External Notifications

- Check available camera footage (traffic cameras, business/residential security cameras)
- Issue Nixle alerts if necessary
- Consider social media postings for public assistance if appropriate

Case 25B06054 Timeline

February 15, 2025

2000 – Last time the parent recalled seeing the male juvenile.

2130 – Last time the parents recalled seeing the female juvenile.

February 16, 2025

0856- Call For Service for a Runaway was reported to the Beaufort Police Department.

0900-1045- Surrounding area searched and leads followed to include school grounds of Mossy Oaks Road, Southside Park, and the local unfinished apartment complex.

The male juvenile's parent arrives on the scene and reports him as a runaway.

The male and female juvenile was entered into (NCIC), National Crime Information Center.

The SRO from Bridges Preparatory School was contacted in an attempt to locate any friends or information about the juvenile.

Contact was made with the local Dollar General and the photo of the juvenile was shown around in an attempt to locate the child.

0910- Phone number for 2nd unknown phone acquired and pinged (offline)

1015- The marina parking lot at 1020 Bay Street.

1045- Units find out vehicle information and begin using the Flock System.

- The vehicle was observed using Flock leaving the city at 2009 on February 15, 2025.
- The vehicle was observed using Flock at 2345 near I-516 southbound at on February 15, 2025.

(The Flock system was used throughout the shift to obtain vehicle whereabouts to enlist the help of other agencies)

1100- A separate case was opened for ESKEETES as a runaway.

1151- The supervisor meets with the female juvenile's parents.

1246- Family states nothing appears to be taken from home, finds runaway note. It was confirmed it was in the juvenile's handwriting.

1304- Flock hits on the vehicle in Jacksonville Florida.

1307- The Supervisor has Dispatch send a teletype message to Florida requesting assistance

1311- Florida agencies confirmed having the teletype/BOLO and began searching the area

1530- Florida agencies report negative contact, and inform BFPD they will continue to use Flock themselves in an attempt to locate.

2137- Parents request officers alert local business in the area.

February 17, 2025

0802- Case Follow-up made with parents.

0844- Case Follow-up made with parents.

1020- Case Follow-up made with parents.

1103- Case Follow-up made with parents.

1223- Case Follow-up made with parents.

1226- Chief Price contacted the female juvenile's parents

1239- Chief Price contacted the female juvenile's parents

1241- Chief Price contacted the female juvenile's parents

1244- Chief Price contacted the female juvenile's parents

1253- Jacksonville Sheriff's Office was contacted again for assistance in locating the juveniles

1255 – Dispatch was contacted to release another teletype/Bolo requesting assistance from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

1259- A Department social media Flyer was released.

1317- Case Follow-up made with parents.

1508- Case Follow-up made with parents.

1521- Case Follow-up made with parents.

1734- Case Follow-up made with parents.

1746- Case Follow-up made with parents.

1819- Case Follow-up made with parents.

2134- Councilman Scallate first learned of missing child

2154- Councilman Scallate requested a meeting with City Manager, Chief of PD and Kiel (Emily's father)

2158- City Manager confirms meeting for Feb 18th, 2025 at 1030

February 18, 2025

Actions and coordination taken throughout the day:

- Command Staff meet with the father of the female juvenile to hear concerns.
- A Lieutenant was assigned as a liaison to oversee the case.
- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is involved and created an additional flyer which has been disseminated.
- Teletype was confirmed/BOLO for the entire state of Florida confirmed
- The Beaufort County Sheriff's Office intel department has also posted their information (photos and descriptions) and put out to Crime Stoppers that is specific to runaways.
- The South Carolina Law Enforcement Fusion Center got involved and all phone numbers, license plates, and social media platforms used were provided for monitoring.
- Continued investigation of all names and possible leads as they were provided.
- Investigations contacted the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to use their additional camera system to track the vehicle

0858- Councilman Scallate/ Calls Chace's family

1030- Councilman Scallate/ Attends meeting

1229- Councilman Scallate/ Follow up call to Emily's family

1348- Councilman Scallate/ Follow up call to Emily's family

1402- Councilman Scallate/ Follow up call to Chace's family

February 19, 2025

0800- It was observed the juvenile's vehicle tag had hit on Flock Camera System at 1:33 in the morning in Jacksonville.

0814 – The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office was contacted about the information.

0930- Councilman Scallate/ Follow up call to Emily's Family

0941- It was reported the juveniles were seen at a McDonald's in Jacksonville.

0941 – The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office was contacted about the information

1030- Advised the Florida Highway Patrol may be out with the vehicle on I-95 in Jacksonville

1122 – Was able to confirm the vehicle and the children were in the custody of the Florida Highway Patrol.

1132 – The female Juvenile's parents were notified, but we were unable to get a hold of the male juvenile's parents. An officer was sent to the marina in an attempt to contact the mother.

1136- Councilman Scallate/ Follow up call to Emily's family (mother notified me that children had been located)

1143- Councilman Scallate/ Follow up call to Chace's family

1237- Notified the female juvenile's parents again.

1249- The male juvenile's parent was notified.