



**State of Florida
Department of Children and Families**

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Taylor N. Hatch
Secretary

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ORLANDO SENTINEL COMMUNICATIONS COMPANY, LLC

633 North Orange Avenue

Orlando, FL 32801-1349

Roger Simmons, Executive Editor, rsimmons@orlandosentinel.com

Jeff Schweers, Tallahassee Reporter, jschweers@orlandosentinel.com

Sent via Email

Re: CEASE AND DESIST

It has been reported to the State of Florida Department of Children and Families that *Orlando Sentinel* reporter Jeff Schweers has been contacting Florida foster families and both falsely and with malicious intent asserting that the families are implicated in fraudulent activity by accepting financial assistance from Hope Florida Foundation, Inc., a charitable Direct Support Organization affiliated with this Department. After hurricanes Helene and Milton, these foster families had home restoration work admirably gifted to them by the Hope Florida Foundation to restore their living conditions so that they could continue to care for their foster children in their homes. It is believed that Mr. Schweers' threats and accusations were used as coercion to get the families to make negative statements about Hope Florida for his reporting, and/or to dissuade them from accepting future assistance.

Foster families are the backbone of Florida's child welfare mission, taking into their home abused or neglected children and providing them a stable family setting with which to grow and thrive. Here, the two (that we know of) families contacted were aided by Hope Florida Foundation, Inc., in rebuilding their foster homes after a devastating storm to ensure their caregiving was uninterrupted. To harass and intentionally cause distress to foster families by threats and coercion is abhorrent.

Cease and desist the above-described intimidation of these families.

State of Florida, Department of Children and Families

2415 North Monroe Street, Suite 400, Tallahassee, Florida 32303-4190

Mission: Work in Partnership with Local Communities to Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency